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THE WEEK

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What happened

The energy shock

Business and political leaders called on the Government this week to introduce emergency financial measures to ameliorate the impact on household budgets of soaring energy prices. The energy price cap, which limits how much households can be charged, rose by 54% this spring, and is expected to rise by a further 82% in October, pushing average annual bills up to some £3,500 a year. And analysts are now predicting that bills could rise again to £4,266 when the price cap is next reviewed in January. That would leave the average household paying £355 a month for energy; currently they're paying £164 a month.

Truss: a lack of urgency?

Rising energy and food costs, driven largely by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, prompted a bleak forecast from the Bank of England last week. It warned that Britain was set to fall into a year-long recession this autumn, during which households would suffer the biggest squeeze on living standards since comparable records began. Unveiling a half-percentage-point interest rate rise to 1.75% – the biggest hike in 27 years – the Bank predicted that inflation would hit a 42-year high of 13.3% in October, up from 9.4% today.

What the editorials said

Gordon Brown has talked of a "financial time bomb" detonating this autumn, said The Daily Telegraph, and the former Labour leader is right about the scale of the crisis. The sharp rises in energy costs will be hard for most people to absorb. "For many they will be impossible." How the Government will respond is still unclear. Liz Truss says that, if she wins the Tory leadership election, she'll focus on cutting taxes. Rishi Sunak has promised further targeted help, but won't go into specifics until the new price cap level is announced at the end of the month.

As for Boris Johnson, said The Guardian, he appears to have "washed his hands" of the problem; No. 10 says no big fiscal measures will be introduced during his last weeks in office. It would be unfair to blame the PM, Truss or Sunak for the "nightmarish economic conjuncture" facing us, which is mainly a product of the Ukraine war and the pandemic, but their "lack of urgency is unforgivable". The Government needs to pull its finger out, agreed The Independent. "This is a truly defining moment in British politics" – one that will not just shape the future direction of the Tories, but "determine how well our democracy can respond to a social and economic crisis".

What happened

China retaliates

China has staged the largest military drills ever conducted around Taiwan, in response to a visit to the island by Nancy Pelosi, the Speaker of the US House of Representatives. During six days of war games, China's People's Liberation Army (PLA) fired ballistic missiles over Taipei and into waters near Taiwanese ports, and simulated attacks in the skies and sea around the island. At least 41 Chinese ships and 100 jets crossed the median line in the Taiwan Strait, which separates the island from mainland China, disrupting flight paths and shipping lanes.

An anti-Pelosi protest in Taipei

Pelosi, the most senior US politician to set foot in Taiwan since 1997, had said during her visit that Washington's commitment to the island was "ironclad". "We are not going to abandon Taiwan," she vowed. But her trip unleashed an outpouring of nationalist rhetoric in China, and was met with fury in Beijing, which views Taiwan as part of its sovereign territory.

What the editorials said

Pelosi's visit was reckless in the extreme, said The Observer. She might have wanted to "stand up for democracy", but in making this trip, she "ignored President Biden's wishes and Pentagon advice" and "alarmed" US allies like Japan. And for what gain? None. Pelosi has long been a critic of Beijing's human rights record, said The Washington Post: in 1991, she unfurled a banner in Tiananmen Square to highlight the killing of protesters by Chinese authorities there in 1989. But this visit smacked of self-indulgence. Pelosi knows that she'll lose her role as Speaker if, as expected, the Democrats lose November's mid-term elections, and has an eye on her legacy. Visiting Taiwan, she unwisely concluded, could help her secure it.

Actually, Pelosi "did the right thing", said The Times. Taiwan is a flourishing democracy of 23 million people, yet China's "intransigence" has left it isolated, too often viewed as "expendable" by its supposed allies. By welcoming Pelosi, Taiwan showed it won't be cowed by Beijing's threats, said the Taipei Times. Pelosi, in turn, revealed herself to be a "comrade-in-arms in the fight against tyranny".

It wasn't all bad

A stand-up comic who went ahead with his show on the Edinburgh Fringe, although only one person had turned up to watch it, has now almost sold out his run. Robin Grainger said he'd been looking forward to his gig, and felt "a bit sad" when he learnt he'd sold just one ticket. He rallied, however, and tailored his hour-long routine to the one person watching – Mike Cass, a radio director from Leicester. Cass said he'd loved the show, and when the story went viral, ticket sales soared.

An extremely rare sea slug has been recorded in British waters for the first time, by a diver on holiday in the Isles of Scilly. The slug, called Babakina anadoni**, is usually found in warmer waters around the coast of Spain, and can grow up to 2cm long. Diver Allen Murray, 65, said it had struck him as "completely unusual" the moment he saw it. "I was looking at some jewel anemones, which are colourful enough, and then I spotted something that looked out of place and went a bit closer," he said. It's thought that the slug might have drifted over to the Scillies on ocean currents when it was still a free-floating larva.**

A group of Ukrainian medical students from the besieged city of Kharkiv have begun a seven-week course at the University of Cambridge, to fill the gaps in their training caused by the war. The 21 students lost learning time during the pandemic, then had their studies completely disrupted by the Russian invasion. Serhii Alkhimov, 21, had spent four months living in a metro station in Kharkiv, where he was the only medic among 2,000 people. He said the course was "an amazing opportunity to see some of the best medicine in the world".

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COVER CARTOON: HOWARD MCWILLIAM

What the commentators said

"What, I wonder, is the tipping point?" asked Suzanne Moore in The Daily Telegraph. People today seem curiously resigned to the dysfunctional state of the country: the A&E delays, the lack of dentists taking on new patients (*see page 4*), the train strikes, the unsolved crimes, the passivity of politicians in the face of crippling price hikes. The summer weather appears to have lulled people into a state of "learned helplessness". Once the sun stops shining, though, the popular mood could "turn on a dime", spelling big trouble for those in charge.

The "economic gale" heading our way could take politics to a very dark place, said Jonathan Freedland in The Guardian. The last such inflation hike, in the 1970s, spawned "a surge in political violence and a rise in support for the racist far-right, in the form of the National Front". When inflation really bites in the autumn, forcing more people to choose between eating and heating, and causing more houses to be repossessed, it will generate a lot of anger, raising the spectre of civil unrest. Tens of thousands of people have already signed up to a "Don't Pay" campaign urging consumers to refuse to pay their energy bills when they go up.

Britain's next PM can certainly expect a rocky time, said Alex Brummer in the Daily Mail. But the idea that the UK is facing some "existential economic crisis" akin to the 1930s depression "is, quite frankly, tosh". While we may be suffering a wave of high inflation, tax revenue is still buoyant, the UK has nearly full employment, and "there are no signs of a dangerous build-up of borrowing". Amid the economic gloom, there are some hopeful signs that inflationary pressures are receding, said Mehreen Khan in The Times. Brent crude prices have fallen by around 25% from their June peak, on the back of recession fears and increased production. The UN's closely watched monthly food prices index fell by 8.6% between June and July, its steepest ever drop. Supply chain disruptions in Asia have eased: the cost of delivering freight from there to the rest of the world "has collapsed by nearly three-quarters since its peak in mid-2021". With luck, and time, these changes will ease the cost-of-living crisis.

What next?

In May, the Government announced a package of support, including a £400 discount on energy bills for all UK households, and an extra £650 for low-income households, to help with rising fuel bills this autumn. The consumer expert Martin Lewis has called on it to double those figures to take account of steeper price rises.

Under the Government's latest "reasonable worst case scenario", officials believe the UK could experience blackouts for several days in January if cold weather coincides with a reduction in gas imports. Norway announced on Monday that it may limit exports to countries including the UK during the winter to prevent domestic gas shortages.

What the commentators said

It's tempting to see China's sabre-rattling as just "the latest chapter in a long-running saga", said Gideon Rachman in the FT. "The US and China were squaring off about Taiwan in the 1950s"; and while tensions have sporadically flared ever since, war has always seemed unlikely. "But this time feels different." Beijing has grown "noticeably more aggressive" under President Xi Jinping, who has repeatedly talked up the "reunification" of Taiwan with China, calling it a historic mission that "cannot be passed down from generation to generation". That has raised popular expectation to such a pitch that some Chinese nationalists seem disappointed that the PLA didn't "shoot down Pelosi's plane". Attitudes in the US have hardened, too. China's threat is about the only issue that attracts bi-partisan consensus, and Biden has now said three times that the US would fight to defend Taiwan if China invades – a departure from official US policy of "strategic ambiguity". These are troubling times, agreed The Economist, not least for Taiwan itself, which is "stuck in a dangerous grey zone in the contest between America and China".

Fortunately, said Charles Parton in the Daily Mail, a seaborne invasion of Taiwan would be exceptionally hard to pull off. Sea and weather conditions in the Taiwan Strait are notoriously adverse; the island only has "14 beaches that make feasible landing sites", making it easier to defend; and its "porcupine" strategy of arming itself with myriad agile and concealable weapons has left it "bristling with drones, high-speed boats" and missiles. Besides, China can ill-afford a war, said George Magnus on UnHerd. Its "zero-Covid" policy is exacting a heavy toll on its economy, and the sanctions that would follow an invasion would devastate trade with its biggest markets. Some 80% of the semi-conductors it uses come from abroad; three-fifths of those come from the US, Japan and the EU. "For the time being", economic self-interest is likely to deter China from launching an invasion – however bellicose its rhetoric may sound.

What next?

China suspended diplomatic cooperation with the US in several areas in the wake of Pelosi's visit. Beijing halted talks with Washington on climate change, as well as cooperation on cross-border crime-prevention and dialogue with US military commanders. It has also targeted Pelosi and her family with sanctions.

Military analysts think that China's drills near Taiwan set a "new normal", reports The Guardian, and expect Beijing to continue mano-euvres in the months ahead. Though China rehearsed a blockade, its drills didn't include all elements of a potential invasion.

THE WEEK

Homer Simpson would never be described as a motivated self-started, but he didn't approve of industrial action. "When you don't like your job, you don't go on strike," he opined, in an episode of *The Simpsons* from 1995. "You do your job half-assed. That's the American way." Decades later, his philosophy is catching on. In a phenomenon dubbed "quiet quitting", a growing number of people are said to be opting not to leave jobs they've tired of, but instead to stick with them, while doing the minimum required to avoid being fired. Beyond the fact that people are talking about it on social media, it's not clear if this amounts to an observable trend, but it does tally with polls suggesting a growing disenchantment with the world of work. This set in before the pandemic, but it has perhaps been exacerbated by people re-evaluating their priorities during lockdowns – whether because they'd enjoyed having to work less or been exhausted by having to work more. For employers, this could be a dangerous moment. People quitting can create short-term problems, but sooner or later, they can be replaced; people mentally checking out of their jobs, while remaining in post, creates a far thornier problem. The trend may prove ephemeral: it's a bit soul-destroying to do a job, however badly, that you don't care about. But if it doesn't, bosses will have to think a lot harder about how to motivate and engage their staff; if not, they risk being stuck with a zombie workforce that slowly drains their business of its life force.

Caroline Law

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Controversy of the week

The looming drought

Collecting water in the summer of '76

"If heatwaves are climate change's swift and deadly invasion troops, then drought is its slow but crippling undercover agent," said India Bourke in The New Statesman. Last month, England chalked up its hottest day on record; it was also its driest July since 1935. And with a new heatwave under way this week, an official drought declaration was predicted to be imminent. Rivers are "perilously low"; farmers are worried about a re-run of the 1976 drought, when crops failed and food prices rose by 12%, and a growing number of water companies have introduced hosepipe bans, or are planning to. Stand by for more brown lawns and empty swimming pools.

I'm confused, said David Frost in The Daily Telegraph. Why are consumers being urged to curb their demand, when surely the solution is to fix the supply? Met Office data shows that we have enough water: if anything the UK is getting wetter. The problems lie in timing – we get more rain in winter but less in summer; and locality – the south of England is drier. With investment in storage, distribution and conversion facilities these problems could be overcome; but we last built a reservoir 30 years ago, and the Thames Water desalination plant in east London (which turns salt water into fresh) is lying idle. The water companies have much to answer for, said The Times. Customer bills have soared since privatisation, yet instead of investing in infrastructure and fixing pipes (a whopping 20% of the UK's water supply is lost to leaks), the sector has paid out £72bn to private shareholders and piled £56bn of debt on its balance sheet.

If companies are to change their behaviour, they're going to need clearer direction from government, said India Bourke. The directives to which they're subject at present are contradictory: they're told they must extract less water from rivers in the interests of conservation and reduce their carbon footprint; but at the same time they're told to build new reservoirs and other infrastructure projects that use up huge amounts of energy. We consumers need more direction too – on installing aerated taps to improve efficiency, for example, or using butts to collect rainwater for use in the garden. Yet to focus solely on domestic conservation and supply would be short-sighted, said Donnachadh McCarthy on The Independent. We should also look at water consumption by energy producers. Across Europe, energy production accounts for fully 44% of water usage. A switch to renewables would improve this, but the Government is planning to construct up to eight new "water-guzzling" nuclear plants. To run just one of them, Sizewell C, will require two million litres of portable water a day; but it lies in Suffolk, one of the driest parts of the country, and no one seems to have worked out where this water will come from. As water supplies "get increasingly stressed" and Britain gets increasingly parched, we're all going to have start changing our long-term thinking.

Disappearing dentists
More than nine in ten NHS dentists are not accepting new adult patients, an investigation by the BBC and the British Dental Association has shown. The survey of nearly 7,000 NHS practices found that in a third of the UK council areas, there are no dentists taking on new patients; and nationwide, eight in ten practices are not accepting new children for treatment. A separate survey compiled by Healthwatch England warned that some patients are asking for appointments at their usual dentist after a period of absence, only be told that they are no longer registered as patients.

Channel crossings rise
More than 18,000 people have crossed the Channel this year, nearly twice as many as at the same point in 2021, according to figures from the Ministry of Defence. Last Monday alone, 696 people were picked up by the Border Force, making it the busiest day for recorded crossings so far this year. A leaked intelligence report has indicated that nearly four in ten of those making the journey over a six-week period this summer were Albanian. According to media reports, smugglers have been dropping their prices to encourage more people to make the crossing.

Spirit of the age

National Park chiefs have urged the public not to leave memorials to their dead loved ones on Snowdon, citing the case of a plaque inscribed with the words "Love you always" that recently appeared on the Crib Goch ridge. Officials said that they understood the wish to commemorate people in their favourite wild places, but that the cumulative impact could be could be "significant".

The York Dungeon is resisting calls to rename its Dick Turpin carriage ride. Apparently, the tourist attraction has had a slew of complaints about the Dick Turpin show from visitors who find the name "rude"; some have suggested the highwayman be referred to as Richard Turpin instead. "Dick is here to stay!" said the Dungeon's manager.

Good week for:

Restitution campaigns, after London's Horniman Museum became the latest institution to announce the return of Benin Bronzes to Nigeria. Around 72 artefacts looted by British forces in 1897 will be returned in total. Earlier this month, Oxford and Cambridge universities said they would be handing back around 200 objects between them.

Pranks, when it emerged that an image of a distant star, tweeted by a distinguished French physicist and supposedly captured by the James Webb Space Telescope, was actually a slice of chorizo. In a tweet that went viral, Étienne Klein claimed the image was of Proxima Centauri, the closest star to the Sun. Admitting to the hoax, he said he'd wanted to educate people about fake news.

Bad week for:

Domino's Pizza, with news that it has failed to thrive in the birthplace of pizza. Domino's is the world's largest pizza chain, with over 18,500 outlets. But in Italy, customers proved resistant to its charms, and its last stores there have now closed.

Tennis, after one of its greatest stars revealed that she is stepping away from the professional game. Serena Williams, the 23-time grand slam singles champion, is expected to bow out after the US Open. In Vogue, Williams, 40, said that she was not retiring so much as "evolving away from tennis, towards other things".

Car owners, after the president of the AA, Edmund King, admitted that he is so worried about his car being stolen by hackers, he stores its keyless fob in a metal-lined Faraday pouch, inside a metal box, in his microwave oven.

Poll watch

34% of UK adults say taxes and spending on public services should remain at current levels. **26%** think taxes should be raised, to boost spending on public services. **22%** believe taxes should be cut, along with funding to public services. Among those who voted Tory in 2019, **41%** want tax levels to stay the same, **27%** want a cut, and **22%** want an increase. *Opinium/The Observer*

Almost nine in ten UK adults say they've seen their cost of living rise, up from about six in ten in November 2021, according to an ONS survey. The most commonly cited reason is rising food prices (**94%**), followed by energy bills (**82%**). One in four respondents to a Public First survey for the Daily Mail said that they were eating less meat to save money.

Europe at a glance

Berlin

Nuclear U-turn?: Germany's chancellor, Olaf Scholz, has said that it could "make sense" to keep the country's last three nuclear power plants online, as reductions in the flow of gas from Russia raise fears of a difficult winter. As part of a decade-old policy championed by ex-chancellor Angela Merkel, the last three plants are scheduled to close by the end of 2022; and any deviation from that could create divisions in Scholz's coalition. The liberal Free Democrats are in favour of allowing the plants to keep running; the Greens are staunchly opposed to nuclear power, but its leaders have indicated that they might accept a limited extension.

Paris

Drought worsens: Trucks have been transporting water to scores of French towns and villages as the country wilts in its worst drought on record. Ministers have warned that in at least 100 communes, boreholes are dry and there is "nothing left in the pipes". Rainfall in July totalled just 9.7mm, and in swathes of the country temperatures have routinely hit the high 30s. Farmers say their crops are dying in the fields, which will only lead to further rises in food prices: yields of key crops across Europe are forecast to be down by around 8% due to the heat. Meanwhile, the output of nuclear power stations on the Rhône and Garonne rivers has been reduced, owing to the river water being too warm to cool the reactors. The majority-state-owned utility EDF, which operates the nuclear plants, estimates that its annual power output will be the lowest in more than three decades.

Warsaw

Martial rhetoric: Poland's right-wing government ramped up the rhetoric in its long-running dispute with Brussels this week, threatening to turn "all our cannon" on the European Commission, and even to attempt to remove its president, Ursula von der Leyen. If the EC tries to "push us to the wall, we will have no choice but to pull out all our weapons", said Krzysztof Sobolewski, general secretary of the ruling Law and Justice party. The dispute centres on €35bn in pandemic relief funds that Brussels has declined to release to Warsaw until it meets specific rule-of-law "milestones". The EC's concerns centre around reforms that it says undermine the independence of the Polish judiciary. Poland's de facto leader, Jarosław Kaczynski, says his government has met its side of the deal by rolling back its reforms, but that its "concessions have yielded nothing". He has accused the EU trying "to break Poland".

Moscow

Athlete jailed: A Russian court sentenced the US basketball player Brittney Griner to nine years in jail last week, at the conclusion of her high-profile trial on drug smuggling charges. Her lawyers have said they will appeal. Griner, 31, was arrested at a Moscow airport in February after two vape cartridges containing cannabis oil were found in her luggage. She admitted to having packed the cartridges, but insisted she had done so by mistake. A day after the sentencing, Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, said that Moscow was ready to discuss a prisoner swap. It has been speculated that the Kremlin will seek the release from a US jail of the arms dealer Viktor Bout, aka The Merchant of Death, in exchange for freeing Griner.

Athens

Spy scandal: Greece's prime minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, has been put under extreme pressure by reports that the security services tried to install spyware on a phone belonging to the leader of a rival party. Nikos Androulakis, who leads the socialist Pasok Movement for Change, and who is also an MEP, described the attempted bugging of his phone as a threat to the human rights and freedoms of all Greek citizens. The spyware in question is called Predator and, like the better known Pegasus software, it can unlock encrypted messages, and activate the phone's microphone to listen in on conversations. Greece's head of the National Intelligence Service (EYP) has resigned. Mitsotakis described the attempted surveillance as a "huge and unforgivable mistake", but denied authorising it, or having any knowledge of it. His opponents have likened it to the Watergate scandal.

Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine

Nuclear plant attacked: Missiles have struck the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in southeastern Ukraine, damaging radiation sensors and causing a reactor to shut down. Both Ukraine and Russia have accused the other of carrying out the strikes, which have been described as "suicidal" by the UN's secretary-general. The plant was seized by Russian forces in March, but it continues to be staffed by Ukrainians, two of whom were injured in the shelling. President Zelensky has accused Russia of "nuclear blackmail": he says that Russian forces are using the power plant as a post from which to fire rockets without the threat of retaliation. Ukraine's state-owned nuclear power company, Energoatom, has called for the plant to be made a military-free zone, warning that if shelling continues, it risks a disaster of Chernobyl proportions.

On Tuesday, a Russian airbase on the western coast of Crimea, 110 miles from the frontline, was rocked by a series of blasts, raising speculation that the US has provided Ukraine with more long-range missiles. Video clips posted on social media showed explosions and clouds of smoke emerging from the Saky base in Novofedorivka, as Russian tourists watched in alarm. In his nightly address, Zelensky vowed to "liberate" Crimea, which was annexed by Russia in 2014. He didn't discuss who was behind the attacks, but Ukrainian officials have claimed responsibility for the blasts.

The world at a glance

Los Angeles, California

Spacey fined: The actor Kevin Spacey has lost his appeal to have a court order obliging him to pay $31m to MRC, the producers of the hit show *House of Cards*, overturned. Spacey was sacked from the show in 2017 following "explosive" allegations of sexual misconduct involving young crew members. His sacking forced MRC to cut back the popular Netflix drama from 13 to eight episodes, and last November an arbitrator ordered Spacey to pay them the $31m in compensation. In last week's appeal, a Los Angeles judge confirmed that the actor had indeed violated the anti-harassment policies in his contract. On top of the US lawsuit, Spacey faces allegations of sexual assault in the UK relating to his time at the Old Vic Theatre.

Dallas, Texas

Orbán applauded: Hungary's prime minister, Viktor Orbán, was given a standing ovation last week after giving the opening address at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Texas, during which he called on Christian nationalists in the US and Europe to "unite forces". Barely a month ago, in a speech in Romania, Orbán had caused huge controversy by railing against Europe becoming a "mixed-race" society. In Dallas, he revisited some of his pet themes, taking aim at same-sex marriage, immigration and the liberal media. The four-day event also featured a 108-minute address by Donald Trump, who called on Republicans to deal with "radical left socialist lunatic fascists".

Palm Beach, Florida

Trump's estate raided: In a highly controversial and unprecedented move against a former president, 30 to 40 gloved FBI agents made an unannounced raid on Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida this week, breaking into his personal safe and seizing some papers. The Justice Department, which has been investigating Trump's last days in the White House, had apparently been informed by the National Archives and Records Administration that, in violation of federal law, Trump had in his possession boxes of records containing classified information. The raid is assumed to have been approved by Attorney General Merrick Garland, as well as by FBI director Christopher Wray, a Trump appointee, though the White House claims it had no knowledge of the plan and had not been notified in advance of the move on Mar-a-Lago.

The raid has provoked a furious reaction from Republican loyalists, who accuse the Democrats of launching a witch-hunt. Trump, who was in New Jersey when the raid occurred, compared it to Watergate and claimed it had been orchestrated by "Radical Left Democrats" trying to bar him from running for the presidency in 2024, although the signs are that being able to brand himself a victim of state oppression has revitalised his support.

Matagalpa, Nicaragua

Catholic crackdown: The Nicaraguan government has ordered the closure of seven Roman Catholic radio stations – the latest move by authoritarian president Daniel Ortega to silence any semblance of political opposition. The radio stations all have links to Bishop Rolando Alvarez, an outspoken government critic and faith leader in the northern Matagalpa diocese. One priest, in the town of Sébaco, refused to hand over his radio equipment and live-streamed a plea for parishioners to help: the ensuing protest was eventually broken up by police. Meanwhile, in an online Mass last week, Bishop Alvarez revealed that police had barricaded his residence, effectively placing him under house arrest. In March this year, Nicaragua recalled its ambassador to the Vatican and expelled the Vatican's own representative, the Apostolic Nuncio.

Bogotá

President sworn in: Thousands of people gathered in the Plaza de Bolívar last Sunday as Gustavo Petro was sworn in as Colombia's new president. Petro, 62, a former Marxist rebel who was jailed in the 1980s on charges of illegal arms possession, told the crowd that Colombia now had a "second chance" to combat violence and poverty. He has vowed to redistribute wealth, to provide free university education and to enact high taxes on unproductive lands. Reversing the policies of the previous government, he has also pledged to wean the country off oil and coal in order to tackle the climate crisis, and to end "the war on drugs", a policy that he says had only served to increase the power of Mafia gangs. A former mayor of Bogotá, Petro is expected to form Colombia's first left-wing government. Petro was sworn in alongside his running mate, Francia Márquez, Colombia's first-ever black vice-president.

Matanzas, Cuba

Oil on fire: Cuba's largest oil terminal was struck by lightning last week, igniting a fire that quickly spread to three of the facility's eight crude oil tanks. At least one firefighter was killed, with many more being treated in hospital for burns and smoke inhalation. As the flames engulfed a fourth storage tank, Mexico and Venezuela both sent specialist crews to help tackle the blaze. The Matanzas Supertanker Base is the country's only port capable of receiving large oil shipments. Cuba's government is therefore contemplating plans to construct floating storage facilities in Matanzas Bay to handle further imports. Any delay to oil imports would have a major impact on the country's already perilous fuel situation.

The world at a glance

Gaza Strip, Palestinian Territories
Violence flares: At least 40 Palestinians, including 15 children, were killed in Gaza last weekend, in hostilities sparked by Israel launching what it described as a pre-emptive attack on Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). A further 350 people were injured. Israeli forces started hitting targets in Gaza on Friday, having apparently received intelligence of an imminent PIJ attack. The militants retaliated by firing hundreds of rockets into Israel, forcing residents of cities including Tel Aviv into shelters. Following the killing of one of its senior commanders, PIJ extended its range of fire towards Jerusalem. Israel said its Iron Dome interceptors had shot down most of the rockets, averting civilian casualties. A ceasefire, brokered by Egypt, began on Sunday night and seemed this week to be holding.

Sana'a
Truce extended: The warring parties in Yemen have agreed to extend the current ceasefire by two months. The agreement includes a commitment from both sides to intensify negotiations and push for an "expanded truce agreement" as soon as possible. The country had been braced for renewed violence at the end of an uneasy four-month ceasefire, which both sides had been accused by the other of breaking. However, the UN special envoy, Hans Grundberg, announced last week that Yemen's government, which is backed by a Saudi-led military coalition, had struck a deal with the Iran-linked Houthi rebels to extend the truce. The seven-year conflict, which is widely seen as a proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia, has cost tens of thousands of lives, and left 24 million people reliant on emergency aid.

Seoul
Record flooding: At least eight people were killed this week when the South Korean capital Seoul was hit by its heaviest rainfall in decades. Seventeen inches of rain fell in the worst-affected neighbourhood on Monday, cutting power, submerging cars, inundating metro stations and turning roads into rivers. Around 800 buildings were damaged. Three of the dead are believed to have drowned in basement flats known as *banjiha*. Occupied by the city's poorest residents, these were a feature of the film *Parasite*.

Sanya, China
Resort lockdown: Enforced in a bid to curb rising Covid cases, a strict lockdown has left 80,000 tourists stranded in the Chinese resort city of Sanya, on Hainan Island. More than 800 cases had been recorded across the island – known as "China's Hawaii" – in seven days, leading to the lockdown in line with China's "zero-Covid" policy. To leave Sanya, people must present five negative PCR tests over a seven-day period, but most flights departing the island have already been cancelled.

Kampala
LGBT charity suspended: Officials in Uganda have suspended one of the country's leading LGBT rights groups. Based in Kampala, the non-profit Sexual Minorities Uganda (Smug), which advocated for the rights of sexual minorities, was ordered to cease operations with "immediate effect" for failing to have a valid NGO permit; the same reason was given for the closure of pro-democracy groups last year. Smug said it tried to register with the National Bureau for NGOs in 2012, but was turned down; it condemned the government's action as a "witch-hunt". Homosexual acts are illegal in Uganda and gay people face widespread discrimination. In 2014, there were moves to make some homosexual offences punishable with life terms.

Krugersdorp, South Africa
Rape revenge: Thousands of protesters, outraged by a recent gang rape, descended on a camp used by illegal miners in the South African town of Krugersdorp last week, and set it ablaze. Several miners – mainly illegal immigrants from neighbouring countries – were stripped and beaten. Residents have long complained that illegal miners are behind a violent crime wave in the area; on 28 July, eight models, who had been taken to an abandoned mine to make a music video, were set upon by armed men, and viciously assaulted, sparking a series of protests against gender-based violence (pictured).

Snowy Mountains, Australia
Rocket debris: Chunks of charred metal that were found littering fields in the Snowy Mountains of New South Wales have been identified as parts of a spacecraft launched in 2020 by Elon Musk's SpaceX company. Farmers found the "junk" last week, a month after locals reported being startled by a loud boom. One of the pieces (believed to be from the trunk of a Dragon craft) was three metres long, and was found embedded in the ground like a spear. Although such debris is often burnt up on entry, SpaceX said the fields were within the "expected path" of where it might land.

People

An overlooked football star
The Lionesses were not the first English women's team to compete in a Euros final on home soil, says Jim White in The Sunday Telegraph. In 1984, the second leg of the European Competition for Women's Football was held at Luton Town's Kenilworth Road ground. But the women's game was very different then: halves were limited to 35 minutes, and players juggled international football with full-time jobs. Matches were not broadcast, and went largely unnoticed. "I would say [that in] the lead up to the final we got visited by one camera crew," recalls Gill Coultard, who was in the team. "For the Swedes it was totally different. It was big news in Sweden." The day after the final, which England lost on penalties, she looked through the sports pages, and found a single paragraph about the result. Yet Coultard, who went on to become the first woman to reach 100 international caps, says she has "absolutely no regrets" that she played then, and not now. "My memory is entirely of friends and great times." And she certainly does not begrudge the attention being afforded to the Lionesses; on the contrary, she is glad that their success is shining a bit of long-overdue light on the players of her era. "We call our generation the silent generation," she says. "Nobody heard about us. For years, I was just a pub quiz question: name the five England footballers with 100 caps. Back then, everyone used to get Bobby Charlton, then Bobby Moore, Peter Shilton, maybe Billy Wright. But nobody could name the fifth. No one ever got me. I was the trick answer."

Sanjeev Bhaskar's dream
Sanjeev Bhaskar's sketch show *Goodness Gracious Me* made him a household name; but his success, as an actor and comic, didn't just fulfil his own youthful ambitions. It realised his father's, too. "My parents grew up in pre-partition India and when my dad was 14 he ran away to join a theatre company," he told Ammar Kalia in The Guardian. "He rode the trains and slept on the streets for two months before he was turned away from the company for being too young." After partition, his father moved to the UK, and found work in a factory in west London. For a while, he clung to his dreams: after work, he'd take two buses across the city to study at a film school in Brixton. But when his sister's husband died, he gave it up so that he could support her four children. Years later, he wasn't happy about Bhaskar's choice of career: his own dreams had been crushed, and he was convinced his son would suffer the same disappointment. "You had to see other people who looked like me to believe success was possible," says Bhaskar, "and there was no one else there. But my dad said recently that he's living out his dreams through me, and that makes our old arguments mean nothing. I feel so lucky that our paths have coalesced."

Rowan Atkinson is one of the most successful comic actors of his generation; but when he was growing up, in a farming family in the northeast of England, he thought his future was in electrical engineering. He studied the subject at Newcastle University, says Tanya Gold in GQ, and only fell into comedy when he met Richard Curtis at Oxford, where he was doing a master's on self-tuning control systems. It changed his life: the pair started working together, taking a show to Edinburgh before breaking into TV in 1979 with *Not the Nine O'Clock News*. "It was just a hobby that turned into a job really," says Atkinson. It was fun then: he was in his 20s, and carefree. "But when you're ten years older, it all becomes far more serious and you're far more worried about success or failure." Now, at 67, he is so guarded of his privacy, he won't even name his favourite music (that's "too personal") – and he finds "the business of making things, of acting, of performing" so stressful, he won't watch his own shows. It reminds him of all the "pain" that went into making it; and rather than being pleased about the funny bits, he worries about all the other bits that are not as funny. The passage of time helps, though. One day, he came across an episode of *Blackadder* on a plane, and allowed himself to watch it. "I thought, actually, this is quite funny. This is quite good."

Castaway of the week

This week's edition of Radio 4's Desert Island Discs *featured singer and songwriter John Legend*

1* *Here Comes the Sun* by George Harrison, performed by Nina Simone
2 *They Reminisce Over You (T.R.O.Y)*, written and performed by Pete Rock and CL Smooth
3 *Day Dreaming*, written and performed by Aretha Franklin
4 *Roc Boys (And the Winner is)...*, written and performed by Jay-Z
5 *As*, written and performed by Stevie Wonder
6 *Love On Top* by Beyoncé, Shea Taylor and The-Dream, performed by Beyoncé
7 *L-O-V-E* by Milt Gabler and Bert Kaempfert, performed by Nat King Cole
8 *Superfly*, written and performed by Curtis Mayfield

Book: *The Dawn of Everything by David Graeber & David Wengrow*
Luxury: a piano

* Choice if allowed only one record

Viewpoint:

Small survivors

"Last week one of Charlotte Brontë's 'little books' finally made it home to Haworth. It's a tiny pamphlet, 10cm by 6cm, made by Charlotte when she was 13. It's hard to imagine anything more fragile. Lost for a century, it was last seen in 1916 at auction in New York. [This year], £1m was raised to buy it and send it back. Why do we value little things so highly? I suspect Brontë's book hits a nerve *because* it's so vulnerable. What are the odds? What was it even doing in America? Tiny things that survive don't have to have financial value to be poignant. A clay pipe on the Thames foreshore; a comb in an Egyptian tomb; a Roman glass, iridescent and unbroken – the thought pops up: 'well done, small thing. You made it so far.'"
Louisa Young in The Observer

Farewell

Judith Durham, vocalist with the Seekers, died 5 August, aged 79.

Roy Hackett, one of the leaders of the 1963 Bristol bus boycott, died 3 August, aged 93.

Alastair Little, chef and restaurateur, died 2 August, aged 72.

Issey Miyake, influential fashion designer, died 5 August, aged 84.

Olivia Newton-John, singer, actress and campaigner died 8 August, aged 73.

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We need the state to drive electric cars

Editorial

The Guardian

An abiding failure of government policy in this country, says The Guardian, has been a misguided faith in the market. Westminster and Whitehall routinely underestimate the extent to which state aid is needed to kick-start emerging industries. We saw this with wind turbine manufacture in the late 1990s: while the UK waited for business to develop solutions, Germany and Denmark used state funding to steal a march on us. Now the state is repeating the mistake with electric vehicles, and failing to invest sufficiently in battery manufacturing capacity, a key factor in determining the location of future electric-car-producing hubs. The EU has provided €20bn worth of incentives to "turbocharge" the industry: by 2035, when the sale of new diesel and petrol cars will be banned, 35 battery gigafactories across Europe will be up and running. The UK has just one big battery factory, in Sunderland, and one other planned at nearby Blyth. Yet experts reckon at least six more are needed to be competitive. Unless the British state gets more involved, we'll once again be at the back of the queue.

Why the elixir of youth lies in immigration

John Burn-Murdoch

Financial Times

How easy it is to "slip into the assumption that what currently is, has always been so", says John Burn-Murdoch. We instinctively think of Japan and Italy as places that have always struggled with the effects of an ageing population. We forget that, in 1985, Britain was "considerably greyer" than both. Back then, we had the second-oldest population in Europe: 15% of us were aged 65 or above, compared with 13% in Italy, and just 10% in Japan. Yet today, the UK is the fourth-youngest country in Europe. And what explains this change? Immigration. A steady influx of working-age people, and the fact that immigrant communities have higher birth rates, have "kept Britain's population remarkably dynamic over the 40 years in which peer countries have grown top-heavy". Few of us realise how lucky the UK is in this regard and how fragile is "our grip on this privilege". With fertility rates everywhere in decline, competition to attract workers is growing, and polls show our allure to potential migrants is waning. Politicians who boast about reducing immigration should be careful what they wish for.

The economists have missed out on power

Matthew Syed

The Sunday Times

Energy. It's the root cause of our current economic crisis, says Matthew Syed. But far more than that, it's the key determinant of economic growth at all times, everywhere. Economic textbooks always treat it as a commodity like any other, and as the energy sector makes up just 3% of the modern economy, a minor one at that. But it isn't: it powers human progress. This is the crucial insight of a handful of academics like Dr Michael Muthukrishna of LSE, who are seeking "to put economics on a new footing". A key concept for them is EROI – energy return on investment. If one barrel's worth of oil-based energy can extract 1,000 barrels of oil, as it could back in 1919 when the stuff was near the surface and easy to extract, then the EROI is 1,000. But today, when you have to drill far deeper, one barrel of oil energy yields just five barrels of oil – an EROI of 5. And the EROI of renewables is even less. This, as Muthukrishna argues, is the root cause of the stagnant productivity of recent decades, and until we find a way to unlock entirely new energy sources – nuclear fusion, perhaps – stagnant it will remain. It's not the laws of supply and demand that govern our economic fate, it's the laws of thermodynamics.

Hope springs eternal? Not in modern Britain

James Marriott

The Times

Every society frets about the future, says James Marriott, but none can prosper without the "antibodies of optimism": the underlying belief that a bright future lies ahead. The utopias people envisage change over time – from the postwar suburban fantasies of garden plots and new consumer goods, to the Sixties' faith in "the white heat of a technological revolution", to the Nineties' dream "of a never-endingly affluent Pax Americana". But whatever the dream, what matters is that people believe in it. How dismal then, to note how few of my fellow millennials share any such hope. And who can blame them? A generation of younger people now shell out an ever greater chunk of salary on rent, knowing they'll never make enough for a place of their own. And as a recent study indicates, this anxiety is accompanied by a declining faith in democracy and capitalism. How to have faith in the virtues of the larger economic and political system when your living arrangements are so transitory and precarious? Pessimism "is a leitmotif of the age" and there's only one sure way to dispel it: build more houses.

IT MUST BE TRUE... I read it in the tabloids

Southend Football Club was taken to task on social media last week, after seeming to name part of its stadium after a serial killer. The club had struck a sponsorship deal with a local estate agents – Gilbert & Rose – which involved awarding it naming rights over the West stand. As a result, this became the Gilbert & Rose West Stand. The club seems to have been oblivious to the problem, until fans pointed it out. "I don't think they thought this one through," tweeted journalist Iain Macintosh on Twitter. "Have to say, this leaves Manchester City's legendary Bell End in the shade," wrote another Twitter user.

A new must-have accessory has hit the market in Japan: wearable fans for dogs. Rei Uzawa, of maternity-wear firm Sweet Mommy, came up with the idea after struggling to keep her pet chihuahua cool in the summer, when temperatures in Japan regularly exceed 35°C. Her solution was Cool Dog, a battery-operated, 80g fan on a breathable outfit, which circulates cool air around the pet's body. It also works for cats.

A Mexican grandmother was granted her dying wish, when a 5½ft-tall penis was erected on top of her gravestone. Catarina Orduña Pérez's family said she had a fascination with the male anatomy, and had long ago specified that she wanted a penis statue on her grave. So when she died, aged 99, in January they "decided to make her dream come true", said her grandson. It was unusual, he admitted. But his grandmother had always been "very avant-garde, very forward-thinking".

The IRA: a significant step to saving the planet?

Senator Manchin: "right about everything"

What unexpectedly great news for the planet, said Erik Stokstad on Science.org. Last month, when negotiations in Congress over desperately needed legislation on clean energy collapsed in acrimony, US climate change activists were beginning to despair of the government ever taking meaningful steps to combat the global warming crisis. The Build Back Better bill had been a key piece of President Biden's domestic agenda, but it hit the buffers in a crucial vote in the evenly divided senate because one senator, West Virginia's Joe Manchin, refused to support it. A "centrist" Democrat, he had rejected it on the grounds it would stoke inflation. Yet in the past month, he and senate majority leader Chuck Schumer quietly resumed talks, and last week they suddenly announced an agreement on a bill that contains the most climate funding – $369bn – ever seen in the United States.

The Inflation Reduction Act, or IRA, as it has been dubbed, is the most important climate action legislation in US history, said Silvio Marcacci in Forbes. Its emission-reducing provisions include tax credits for solar and wind power, expanded tax credits for electric vehicles, and large-scale investment in domestic clean-tech manufacturing. Its stated aim is to see greenhouse gas emissions fall to 40% of their 2005 levels by 2030 – an aim that energy and climate change modellers have confirmed has every chance of being met.

The act is far from perfect, said the Los Angeles Times: for a start, at Manchin's insistence, it includes several "wrong-headed concessions to polluting industries", notably a requirement for new oil and gas leases on public lands. But, after years of inaction on climate, it is nonetheless a "transformational" achievement. The much-maligned Manchin deserves huge applause, said Tim Miller on The Bulwark. It was he who sounded the alarm on inflation when leading Democrats dismissed the issue. Now it's he who has delivered a package of serious climate investment. He has been "right about everything".

It's extraordinary the way people are puffing up Manchin's deal as some kind of historic achievement, said Rich Lowry in National Review. In reality it's just "the detritus of President Biden's stymied legislative agenda hastily thrown together in an incoherent muddle". And much of it – extending subsidies for millions of Obamacare users, imposing a 15% minimum tax on large corporations – has nothing whatsoever to do with the climate in any case. And seeing as how it lavishes hundreds of billions of taxpayer money on "government boondoggles" and Democrat special interests, it has nothing to do with reducing inflation either, said an editorial in the same paper, despite its "laughably absurd" name. It doesn't even have much to do with saving the planet, said Jack Spencer on Heritage.org. President Biden's people have long insisted renewable technologies are competitive, so they surely don't need further vast subsidies funnelled their way. "The Inflation Reduction Act is simply a cynical effort to line the pockets of special interests."

But this is a big shot in the arm for Joe Biden however you look at it, said John Harris on Politico. He has just pulled a significant victory out of the hat three months before the midterms. In fact, it's a plot twist that invites "a reappraisal" of his presidency. The old-school dealmaker displayed the nous to recalibrate when his "maximalist goals" proved unreachable, thus giving Manchin and Schumer "cover to achieve incremental ones" and to emerge with a package that will have real impact. Biden's presidency is still "defined by his limits". But it "has more life, and more possibility", than seemed remotely possible a week ago.

The bad law that imperils our democracy

David French

The Dispatch

Answer me this, says David French. "What if Mike Pence had said yes?" What if he'd caved in to Donald Trump's pressure and declared the former president to have won the 2020 election? America probably would have survived that moment, "but the key word there is probably". That Trump and his corrupt "cadre of loyalists" were able to put Pence in such a predicament was in large part due to a single piece of legislation: the Electoral Count Act of 1887. Its convoluted wording is scarily imprecise. It gives congress the right to object to electoral votes "on flimsy or non-existent pretexts" and to "overturn a presidential election upon a simple majority vote". It's also seriously vague in defining the vice-president's role in counting the votes. The good news is that a bipartisan coalition of senators has now drafted the Electoral Count Reform Act, to rectify these potentially fatal flaws: it fixes the ECA's biggest problems, and makes clear that the vice-president can't reject "a single Electoral College vote". The bad news is that House Democrats have made the best the enemy of the good and are demanding even broader reforms. Their resulting bill may fail to pass the senate, leaving the ECA intact for the 2024 election. "As 2020 demonstrated, failure could be catastrophic."

Feeling the heat down on the farm

Tom Philpott

Slate

Working outdoors in the US during the summer months has become a truly punishing experience, says Tom Philpott. In Washington state's Yakima valley, which provides 75% of US-grown hops and a goodly portion of its apples, pears and cherries, workers have just endured seven straight days of temperatures above 37°C (100°F), "peaking at a demonic 42°C (108°F)". The frequency of heatwaves in the US has nearly tripled since the 1960s and, according to the Bureau of Labour Statistics, heat-related fatalities among workers have doubled since the early 1990s. So Washington state has rightly introduced new emergency rules: once the temperature reaches 31.6°C (89°F), employers have to give workers a ten-minute break in full shade every two hours and enough "suitably cool" water for them to drink a quart per hour. But few other states have such rules, and although the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) would like to impose them, it's a move that would risk a legal challenge from the increasingly conservative federal courts on the grounds of executive over-reach. Meanwhile, a bill requiring OSHA to act is languishing in the senate for want of Republican support. Such foot-dragging means one thing: more and more farmworkers dying of heat stroke.

Zawahiri killed by Hellfire: is this the end for al-Qa'eda?

"If you are a threat to our people, the US will take you out"

At 6.15am on 31 July, Ayman al-Zawahiri stepped onto a balcony of a house in an exclusive area of Kabul to get a breath of fresh air. This was part of the 71-year-old al-Qa'eda leader's daily routine at the villa where he was staying with his family, said Shane Harris in The Washington Post. "Sometimes he read. He was always alone." But the CIA was watching. In fact, US officials had been monitoring him for months, patiently waiting for an opportunity to exact revenge on a man who was a key architect of the 9/11 attacks, and who had taken over al-Qa'eda after Osama bin Laden's death in 2011. Three minutes after Zawahiri emerged, "a CIA drone in the sky above fired two Hellfire missiles". Their target might just have had time to look up when he heard "a projectile rocketing towards him", but no more than that. Zawahiri died instantly. His family, who were inside, were unharmed; no civilians were hurt. The missiles used by the US for such "precision strikes" are "loaded with only a small amount of explosives or even none at all"; the Hellfire becomes "a kind of huge speeding bullet". President Biden confirmed the news. "If you are a threat to our people," he declared, "the United States will find you and take you out."

On the face of it, the operation was "a great success" for Biden, said Andrea Spalinger in Neue Zürcher Zeitung (Zurich). But it actually reveals a "grim truth" about the course Afghanistan has taken since the US withdrew from the country last August. Back then, the Taliban regime vowed to fight terror and to bring stability to the country. But we now know that it has been harbouring one of the world's most wanted terrorists, who "moved to Kabul from his previous hiding place in Pakistan earlier this year" – almost certainly with the blessing of the Taliban's powerful interior minister, Sirajuddin Haqqani. Once there, he enjoyed "greater freedom and published statements more frequently again". And Zawahiri wasn't the only terrorist to return to Afghanistan when the Taliban took over: the UN reports that numerous high-ranking al-Qa'eda figures have settled in Kabul in the past year. It's all too clear that, under Taliban rule, Afghanistan is once again a "breeding ground" for terrorist activity, as it was before 9/11.

The killing of Zawahiri is a serious setback for the Afghan regime, said Abdul Basit on Al Jazeera (Doha). By breaking its promise not to harbour terrorists, the Taliban has surely scuppered its chances of getting "international recognition any time soon", or of accessing frozen assets to relieve Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis. That, in turn, will "intensify the intra-Taliban rivalry" between "pragmatists" who want to distance the group from the likes of al-Qa'eda, and "ideologues" bent on continuing to harbour and support terror groups. The Taliban is hopelessly divided, said Al-Ahram (Cairo). Haqqani heads a "powerful faction" – the Haqqani Network – which originated in the east of Afghanistan. It battled Nato troops and the Afghan government for 20 years. But it has rivals within the Taliban leadership, mainly from the southern provinces of Helmand and Kandahar, who are opposed to its extreme tactics – not least, its many past attacks on civilians.

This could mean "the end of al-Qae'da", said Abdul Basit. Zawahiri, an Egyptian doctor, had of late overseen a "slow but steady revival" in its fortunes. But the group has long suffered from financial problems, infighting and "limited command and control" over its various regional offshoots. Now relations with the Taliban are, on both sides, likely to be damaged "beyond repair". All the signs indicate that the demise of the group Zawahiri led for a decade is "near". That seems unlikely, said Asfandyar Mir in The New York Times. Al-Qa'eda still has strong support in Afghanistan and among the Pakistani Taliban. Its "affiliates in East Africa and the Sahel region are on the march". This was a blow to al-Qa'eda, but it will seek to boost recruitment by making Zawahiri a martyr. And its new leader "will inherit a more formidable and dangerous organisation than the one bin Laden left behind for Zawahiri".

THE NETHERLANDS

Our farmers are turning into terrorists

De Volkskrant (Amsterdam)

Protests by Dutch farmers are straying "dangerously close" to terrorism, says Raoul du Pré. The Netherlands is one of Europe's most intensively farmed countries (it has the EU's highest density of livestock, about four times that of the UK or France). And in June, the Government unveiled plans to cut livestock numbers by a third by buying out farmers, in a drive to halve nitrogen and ammonia emissions by 2030. Angry farmers responded by blockading roads outside parliament with tractors, and picketing supermarket distribution centres. In recent weeks, they've gone further. Emboldened by support from right-wing populists, and by lenient policing, they've burnt piles of manure and hay on motorways, even dumping slurry at the home of the minister behind the plans. Contractors clearing up the mess have been threatened; a serious accident is just a matter of time. Enough is enough. Protests are one thing; intimidation is another. "Threatening anyone who gets in the way of their efforts to paralyse the country" is illegal – and it's high time that the police "cracked down".

FINLAND

Don't blame the babushkas for Putin's war

Helsingin Sanomat (Helsinki)

Since Finland lifted its remaining Covid travel restrictions last month, our country has been awash with Russian tourists, says Esa Mäkinen – and many Finns aren't happy about it. Finland is the most "convenient gateway to Europe for Russians", because it's easy to get a Schengen visa here, allowing them to go on to nearly any EU country. But it feels odd to look up from a paper in which we read about dead Ukrainian children, to see a happy group of holidaying Russians at the next café table. The "contrast between the sunny tourist circuit and the darkness of Ukraine" is hard to bear. It's perhaps not surprising, then, that Finland's four largest parliamentary groups now say they support keeping Russian tourists out entirely, to punish Moscow for its invasion. But is that really the right course? There are some 90,000 native Russian speakers living in Finland, many of whom have relations in Russia. Will we keep out Grandma? And what about the many Russians who oppose the war, and want to come to the West "to meet like-minded people"? This is Vladimir Putin's war, and just as EU sanctions target only the oligarchs and politicians who support him, so should a Finnish ban. We should deny visas to those Russians "responsible for the war" – not holidaymakers and "babushkas".

What the scientists are saying…

The world is speeding up

It may have felt pretty standard to most of us, but 29 June was actually the shortest day since accurate records began in the 1960s. Scientists have revealed that the Earth completed its rotation fully 1.59 milliseconds ahead of its 24-hour schedule that day; and it was part of a pattern. In 2020, 28 speed records were set; and the record was nearly broken again this July, when a day came in 1.5 milliseconds short. Yet the long-term pattern is for the Earth's rotation to slow. Every century, it takes about two milliseconds longer for the world to turn. This is believed to be down to the Moon creating tidal friction as it orbits the Earth, slowing both down. It is not unprecedented for the rotation to speed up: the earthquake that triggered the Boxing Day tsunami of 2004, for instance, shifted the Earth's mass to such an extent that 2.68 milliseconds were knocked off the day. But why the past few years should have seen such a flurry of shorter days is not clear: one theory is that it is down to the planet wobbling less on its axis. Previously, the gradual slowing of the rotation has meant that in order to keep civil time (dictated by the beat of atomic clocks) in line with observed solar time, we sometimes have to add a leap second. If the current trend persists, we might have to take a second away.

If you're bored, just sit and think

In this age of constant distraction, people may not spend much time simply sitting and thinking. But when we do, we enjoy it more than we expect to, a study has found. Researchers at Kyoto University asked 259 students in Japan and the UK to predict how much they'd like "just thinking", then asked them to spend between three and 20 minutes alone with their thoughts. In one scenario, participants sat in a dark area with no visual stimulation; in another, they sat in a conference room. The researchers found that people had enjoyed thinking more than they anticipated, and although they didn't love it (they gave it on average a three or four on a seven-point scale), they enjoyed it about as much as other time-passing activities such as checking the news online. "Our research suggests that individuals have difficulty appreciating just how engaging thinking can be," said the study's authors. "That could explain why people prefer keeping themselves busy with devices and other distractions, rather than taking a moment for reflection and imagination in daily life."

Earth: 1.59 milliseconds ahead of schedule

Pig organs brought back to life

Researchers have partially restored function to the hearts, kidneys, livers and brains of pigs, an hour after the animals died. The experiments, described as "stunning", could pave the way for more organs becoming available for transplant – and raise ethical questions about the nature of death. It had always been assumed that when the heart stops pumping, starving the organs of blood – and the oxygen and nutrients it contains – rapid and irreversible cell death follows. But in 2019, a Yale University team partially restored function to pigs' brains, six hours after death, by pumping a form of synthetic blood through their vessels. As well as oxygen and nutrients, it contained drugs to protect cells, prevent clotting and calm the immune system. Now, the same team has achieved a similar feat in the body's other vital organs. "These cells are functioning hours after they should not be," said Prof Nenad Sestan. What it tells us is that the death of cells "can be halted and their functionality restored, even one hour after death".

A vaccine for Covid and the cold

Scientists have made a "promising" step forward in the quest to develop a single vaccine for multiple coronaviruses – including Covid-19 and the common cold. Efforts to develop a "pan-coronavirus" vaccine have been complicated by the fact that the viruses are all different, and they frequently mutate. That is why people get repeated colds. Any pan-coronavirus vaccine would have to trigger antibodies that recognise and neutralise a range of coronaviruses, to stop them replicating in the cells. Now, a team at the Crick Institute has identified a previously overlooked area of the SARS-CoV-2 spike protein known as S2, which is similar across coronaviruses, and less prone to mutate – and which could be a target for the jab. The research is in its early stages, but tests on mice have had promising results, the team said.

Bumblebees have feelings too

Bumblebees are known to be highly intelligent, capable of doing simple maths, and distinguishing human faces. Now, a series of experiments has suggested that they may also have a level of conscious awareness, or sentience. In one, bees were exposed to a simulated spider attack when they landed on a flower. After that, "their whole demeanour changed", says Lars Chittka, professor of sensory and behavioural ecology at Queen Mary University of London. "They became, overall, very hesitant to land on flowers, and inspected every one extensively before deciding to land on it." By contrast, when they were given a treat, their foraging became more optimistic: they'd be more willing to investigate ambiguous flowers. In another study, the bees were given the choice between feeding from a cool dispenser, or one that had been heated to a painful degree. The bees modified their behaviour to avoid the heat, indicating that they feel pain; but they also made trade-offs – tolerating higher temperatures if the sugar solution on offer was super-concentrated. The team says that the findings suggest that bees should be protected by animal welfare laws.

A level of conscious awareness

Obesity rising in poor areas

Obesity is rising in the most deprived parts of England, a think tank has warned. According to The King's Fund report, 37% of people in the country's poorest areas were obese last year, up from 32% in 2018-19. The proportion of the people in the richest areas who were obese grew too, but by much less and from a lower base: 18% were obese in 2018-19, rising to 19% last year. "The war on obesity is a war the Government is losing. On many fronts it's a war it has surrendered," said Jonathan Holmes, the author of the report. "Eating meals which meet the Government's healthy eating guidelines is unaffordable to most households in more deprived areas. Less healthy processed foods are cheaper and more accessible in deprived areas." The report warns that with the cost of food going up, obesity rates are likely to rise further as more people turn to cheaper processed food.

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Talking points

Pick of the week's *Gossip*

When Boris and Carrie Johnson opted to move their wedding party from Chequers at the last minute, billionaire friends kindly stepped in to help. But it seems the marquee hastily erected in a parched field on Lord Bamford's estate in Gloucestershire may have been a bit big for the do. In The Spectator, the PM's sister, Rachel Johnson, insisted the event was one of the "bang-up parties" of the season, and praised her sister-in-law for her mastery of the "slut drop", a "high-risk dance move" involving dropping to the floor "like a broken deckchair". But a leaked video of the happy couple's first dance suggests a more haphazard affair, says The Daily Telegraph. It shows them swaying awkwardly to *Sweet Caroline*, in a cavernous tent, while vainly urging a threadbare crowd to join in. Earlier, guests had been treated to a joke-filled speech in which the PM said he'd received "masses of letters to resign, mostly from my closest family", and described his forced exit as the "greatest stitch-up since the Bayeux Tapestry".

Woody Harrelson has been dubbed "Wholesome Harrelson" for composing a poem for a nine-month-old baby he's never met. The actor was moved to write his "Ode to Cora" when the child's mother posted a photo of her online, with the caption: "OK but how does our daughter look like Woody Harrelson". "You're an adorable child," Harrelson assured his doppelganger. "Flattered to be compared / You have a wonderful smile / I just wish I had your hair".

Archie Battersbee: the laws of life and death

Hollie Dance with her son Archie

Until recently, none of us knew anything about Archie Battersbee, a "lively 12-year-old" and a promising gymnast, said Judith Woods in The Daily Telegraph. That all changed after 7 April this year, when Archie's mother found him unconscious with a ligature round his neck at his home in Southend, Essex: she believes he'd been taking part in a TikTok "blackout" challenge that "went horribly wrong". At the Royal London Hospital, he was put on a ventilator, but eventually, doctors concluded that he had suffered catastrophic and "irreversible brain stem damage", and that it would be in his "best interests" to switch the ventilator off. His devastated parents, Hollie Dance and Paul Battersbee, "vehemently disagreed", and pursued the matter through the courts. Their painful battle, backed by the Christian Legal Centre, ended in defeat last week, said David Collins in The Sunday Times, and on 6 August, Archie's life support was switched off.

This "heartbreaking case" has played out across mainstream and social media, said Rachel Clarke in The Guardian. And in the sound and fury, some aspects of it have been misreported. Suffering from brain stem death is not the same as being in a coma, or a vegetative state, from which there is a chance of recovery. A person who is brain dead will never regain the automatic functions that keep us alive, including breathing. But for parents, seeing their child on a mechanical ventilator – their chest rising and falling as if they are asleep – while being told there is no hope for them, can be bewildering. Archie's case was further complicated by the fact that owing to his injuries, formal brain death testing was not possible. However, scans showed no blood flowing through his brain stem; necrosis had set in; and such was the swelling, the stem was being pushed out of the skull and into the spinal cord. He was "a child with no prospect of recovery".

I understand that, said Dominic Lawson in the Daily Mail. But what troubles me is the fact that the court would not even allow his parents to move him to a hospice to die. It's true that under English law, the child's interests are paramount, and Archie could well have died in transit. But the court had agreed that he could not feel anything. In these circumstances, could the parents' wishes not be taken into account? Mercifully, cases such as this, where parents and doctors cannot agree a course of action, are rare; but if anything comes out of Archie's story, let's hope it is a mediation system, so that in future, the concerned parties are spared a fight in court.

Truss: gliding into Downing Street?

It's surely all over bar the shouting, said Sebastian Payne in the FT. With recent surveys of Conservative Party members putting Liz Truss more than 30 points ahead of her leadership rival Rishi Sunak, the Foreign Secretary appears to be "on a glide path to Downing Street". Truss has proved a canny player of Tory internal politics, said Gaby Hinsliff in The Guardian. While Sunak alienated many Tory members by moving against Boris Johnson, she has highlighted her loyalty. And she has been telling the Tory faithful exactly what they want to hear, promising early tax cuts and playing down talk of recession. Sunak has become the "actually it's a bit more complicated than that" candidate as he has laboured to pick holes in her arguments. "Anyone who remembers how that ended for Remainers in 2016, or Hillary Clinton up against Donald Trump, will have insight into why Truss has been wiping the floor with him."

Things will get a lot more complicated for Truss if she does indeed succeed Johnson as PM next month, said Jessica Elgot in The Guardian. For while the Tory members who are deciding this race through a postal ballot may be lapping up her talk of tax cuts, many of her colleagues are highly sceptical of "Trussonomics". Given that she would already be entering Downing Street without the backing of a majority of Tory MPs, these party divisions could soon cause her all sorts of trouble. Truss's policies don't seem all that popular with the wider electorate either, said The Times. In a new Ipsos-Mori poll, 64% of voters, and 68% of Tory voters, said the priority should be tackling inflation, not offering tax cuts. The public is right to be suspicious of Truss's brand of what Sunak has dubbed "fairytale economics". By choosing a PM who appeals to their own narrow interests, Tory Party members "risk losing the next election".

Don't take any of Truss's current promises too literally, said John Rentoul on The Independent. The record of the former anti-monarchist Liberal Democrat and centrist pro-Remain Tory shows that she is not afraid of abandoning positions if they get in the way of her quest to get ahead. If and when she wins the leadership campaign, she'll swiftly change tack. The pressure to provide more targeted help to voters through what she now dismisses as "handouts", rather than through tax cuts that would be of no help to vulnerable pensioners and benefit claimants, would be impossible to resist. Truss will no doubt soon switch and co-opt "all the positions that Sunak has been trying unsuccessfully to sell" to Tory members. A pivot is coming. "The only question is how skilfully she makes the transition."

Alex Jones: a high price for wicked lies

"Try to imagine the horror of your six-year-old son being gunned down at school." Then think what it would be like to have a series of wicked lies spread about his murder: "unhinged" claims that the shooting was a hoax, staged by the government to promote gun control laws, and that you are not a grieving parent, but a paid "crisis actor". Imagine, on top of all that, being harassed and threatened by "zealots" who believe these falsehoods. This was the "unspeakable" horror endured by Scarlett Lewis and Neil Heslin, whose son, Jesse, was one of the 20 children shot dead at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut in 2012, said The Washington Post. Last week, after ten years of torment, the pair were awarded $49.3m in damages and punitive damages against Alex Jones, the "media provocateur" who'd defamed them by propagating these lies.

Jones: a "blowhard" humbled

The humbling of Jones by a Texas jury is unambiguously good news, said Tom Leonard in the Daily Mail. For years, this gravel-voiced "blowhard" has peddled "far-fetched fantasies to America's most gullible". Via his Infowars website, radio show and YouTube videos, Jones accused the US government of fabricating the 9/11 terror attacks and other atrocities. He claimed that Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton were (literally) sulphurous demons, and that the "Deep State" was bent on creating a satanic "New World Order". Such a carnival of conspiracy would be laughable, said Nicole Hemmer on CNN – were it not for the fact that Jones's wild talk of "false flags, crisis actors and paedophile rings" has caught on. He was "mainstreamed" by the Trump presidency, and his "thinking, rhetoric and style are now well-integrated in the Republican Party".

"Speech is free but lies you have to pay for," declared the parents' lawyer, in one pithy riposte. "Sadly, this is rarely borne out by the facts," said Ian Birrell in The i Paper. While it was gratifying that Jones was forced to admit that he'd lied – he blamed a "form of psychosis" – the true significance of the legal case was its forensic uncovering of the money to be made in the "deception and paranoia" business. At one point in 2018, Infowars was making $800,000 a day; Jones built a fortune of at least $135m. "There have always been false prophets, hucksters and malicious liars", but the internet has given them the platforms to spread their poison, and get rich from it. If the looming downturn prompts a further loss of faith in mainstream politics, the "hate-mongers" may soon find "fertile new fields to seed" – in America, and in Britain, too.

Batgirl: the felling of a superhero

I confess that superhero films are not my "bag", said Alexander Larman in The Spectator; yet I can see why people were looking forward to *Batgirl*. It had a "potentially interesting" lead, in the form of the Latina actress Leslie Grace's Batgirl; it had several big stars in other roles including Michael Keaton, "gamely" donning the bat cloak for the first time since he played the Caped Crusader in 1992; and directed by Adil El Arbi and Bilall Fallah, the Belgian-Moroccan duo behind the hit film *Bad Boys for Life*, it promised at least a couple of hours of "undemanding entertainment". Yet last week, Warner Bros. stunned Hollywood by announcing that it was cancelling the film, although shooting has wrapped on the $90m production. *Batgirl* won't be released in cinemas; and it won't be shown on Warner's streaming platform either.

Grace as the titular heroine

It's not the first big movie to be cancelled, said Guy Lodge in The Guardian. Netflix pulled the plug on a 2017 biopic of Gore Vidal after sexual misconduct allegations started piling up against its star, Kevin Spacey. Other films have been deemed just too terrible to release. The classic example is *The Day the Clown Cried*, Jerry Lewis's 1972 Holocaust drama; it was so misconceived, Lewis made efforts to ensure that it would not be seen in his lifetime. But why *Batgirl* has been cancelled is far less clear.

Its reception at test screenings are said to have been "chilly", said Robbie Collin in The Daily Telegraph; but the idea that the film was "unreleasably" bad doesn't stack up. It's not as if the barrier to entry into the "great streaming ecosystem" is set high: some of Netflix's homegrown blockbusters are dreadful. In the past, DC and Marvel have made the best of their duds by releasing them as widely as possible, in order to sell as many tickets as possible before word of mouth can spread. What we may be seeing is a dismal new approach: rather than spend more millions to market the film, the bean counters decide to dump it as a tax write-off. That might make "blunt financial sense", but it also kills the film completely: it means it can never be shown; and for the crew and cast, that is devastating. They will have devoted years of their lives to the project, and be left with nothing to show for it.

Wit & Wisdom

"Rock'n'roll might not solve your problems, but it does let you dance all over them."
Pete Townshend, quoted in Far Out

"Always be sincere, even if you don't mean it."
Attrib. to Harry S. Truman, quoted on The Knowledge

"The best time to plant a tree is 20 years ago; the second-best time is today."
Chinese proverb, quoted in The New York Times

"Martyrdom is the only way in which a man can become famous without ability."
George Bernard Shaw, quoted in The Times

"When you slip on a banana peel, people laugh at you; but when you tell people you slipped on a banana peel, it's your laugh."
Nora Ephron, quoted in The New Statesman

"Only the vanquished remember history."
Marshall McLuhan, quoted on History.com

"Never call yourself an expert and never claim to write the complete book of anything."
Diana Kennedy, quoted in the Los Angeles Times

"If you give me six hours to chop down a tree, I'll spend the first four hours sharpening my axe."
Abraham Lincoln, quoted in Design Week

"We have to devise means of making known the facts in such a way as to touch the imagination of the world."
Eglantyne Jebb quoted in the Financial Times

Statistic of the week

In the two years between 2018 and 2020, 650 children were strip-searched by the Metropolitan Police. In 23% of cases no appropriate adult was present, in defiance of statutory guidance. In 58% of cases, the child was black. In total, 53% of the searches led to no further action.

Scotland Yard/ The Daily Telegraph

Sport

Football: Manchester United gets off to a "horror" start

If Erik ten Hag "did not already appreciate the task he has taken on, he does now", said Chris Wheeler in the Daily Mail. Last Sunday, the Dutchman's tenure as Manchester United's manager got off to the worst possible start, as his side slumped to a 2-1 defeat against Brighton & Hove Albion. Prior to the match, there was a "carnival atmosphere" at Old Trafford: ten Hag received a standing ovation when he "emerged into the afternoon sunshine". In the nine years since Sir Alex Ferguson's retirement, a similar wave of optimism has greeted each managerial appointment at United. Yet so far, all have proved "false dawns". While it's too early to say if ten Hag will prove another (even Ferguson lost his first match in charge), the "horror show" that unfolded on Sunday suggests he has his work cut out. Afterwards, even he admitted as much, describing the task facing him as a "hell of a job".

Erik ten Hag: "a hell of a job"

When the former Ajax manager arrived at Old Trafford over the summer, he wasted little time in unveiling a strict new behavioural code, said Jonathan Wilson in The Guardian. He banned drinking alcohol during match weeks; he promised to drop any player who arrived late for training; and he culled the squad's personal chefs "in an effort to improve nutrition and refocus minds on the club". Such measures may have improved fitness, but so far they haven't discernibly affected performance. Against Brighton, United's "pressing was no better than it had been in the worst days of last season", and their defence lacked all structure. Meanwhile, several squad members seem desperately short of confidence – none more so than Marcus Rashford, who remains "a shell of the player" he was a couple of seasons ago.

Ten Hag also has a very big Ronaldo problem, said Ian Whittell in The Daily Telegraph. The Portuguese star desperately wants to leave Old Trafford, so he can play Champions League football this season. But the fact is that until United sign another "proven finisher", the 37-year-old – initially left on the bench against Brighton – remains the best out-and-out striker they have. It was only when he was introduced in the second half that the team began to look as if they had a "focal point". Ronaldo, though, isn't the real issue, said Henry Winter in The Times. Whether he stays or leaves, what's clear is that the squad needs a substantial overhaul – and the real question is whether the club's owners, the Glazer brothers, will give ten Hag the "control and resources" needed to effect it. In recent years, they've instilled a culture more focused on "making money" than on "making footballing memories". Ten Hag is a fine manager – but if he is to transform United, he needs the Glazers to "help him do it".

Commonwealth Games: a memorable "sporting party"

Until recently, 17-year-old Andrea Spendolini-Sirieix was best known as the daughter of Fred Sirieix, the maître d' who made his name on Channel 4's *First Dates*. But now she's threatening to eclipse him, said Ben Bloom in The Daily Telegraph. On the last day of the Birmingham Commonwealth Games, she cemented her status as England's breakout star of the fortnight by "adding mixed synchronised 10m platform gold to her earlier diving gold and silver".

Siosi: the loudest cheers

These were a triumphant Games for England, said Tumaini Carayol in The Guardian. The host nation's final tally, of 176 medals (57 golds), beat by two its previous record of 174 medals at Glasgow 2014. England finished a close second behind Australia, who claimed 178 medals (67 golds). Yet the most enjoyable aspect of any Commonwealth Games is the "underdog stories" they throw up, said Andy Bull in The Guardian. Birmingham 2022 will be remembered not just for the exploits of swimmer Tom Dean – who claimed seven medals to become England's most decorated competitor at a single Games – but for the heroics of Rosefelo Siosi, the long-distance runner from the Solomon Islands. He was so far off the pace in the men's 5,000m that for his 80-second final lap, he "had the track to himself". But as the 25-year-old crossed the finishing line, 90 seconds behind the rest of the field, the crowd rose to its feet as one, cheering "even louder" than it had for the winners.

"What these Games have shown, without doubt, is Britain still loves a sporting party," said Rick Broadbent in The Times. At the Rio Olympics there were sometimes "only a few thousand" attending athletics sessions: "here there were more than 30,000 for morning heats". Some say the Commonwealth Games have become an anachronism in the modern age – and there is talk of their being scaled down in future. But at their best, as Birmingham 2022 has shown, they remain a "wonderful mixed bag".

Can Raducanu step back into the limelight?

In just over a fortnight, Emma Raducanu will begin the defence of her US Open title, said Stephen Davies in The Mail on Sunday. But last week, her preparations "suffered another setback" after she was "bullied into defeat by Liudmila Samsonova of Russia" in the quarter-finals of the Washington Citi Open in Washington. The 19-year-old blew four set points in the first set, and from then on her performance was "dismal". She slumped to a 7-6, 6-1 defeat.

Not feeling the pressure?

It's an inauspicious start for Raducanu, who has won just ten of her 23 matches this year, said Jamie Johnson in The Daily Telegraph. She keeps losing to players ranked well below her – Samsonova was the world No. 60 – and keeps getting injured. In the past year, the afflictions have mounted: sore ribs, a foot injury, shortness of breath. In Washington, she suffered a return of the blisters on her right hand that plagued her at the Australian Open in January.

Another issue is her lack of "coaching consistency": she has hired and fired two coaches over the past year, and is now working on a temporary basis with the Russian former player Dmitry Tursunov. Yet Raducanu insists she isn't feeling any pressure. "I'm still 19. I'm a slam champion, so no one's going to take that away from me. The pressure is on those who haven't done that."

Sporting headlines

Football City began their title defence with a 2-0 victory over West Ham. Last year's runners-up, Liverpool, drew 2-2 against Fulham.

Tennis Serena Williams, the 23-time grand slam winner, announced her retirement. In his first tournament since reaching the Wimbledon men's final, Nick Kyrgios of Australia won the Citi Open in Washington, beating Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka 6-4, 6-3.

Golf In the first ever Women's Open held at Muirfield, South Africa's Ashleigh Buhai beat South Korea's In Gee Chun on a play-off to win the title.

Pick of the week's correspondence

Talking tough on Taiwan

To the Financial Times

Your article "Squeezing Taiwan" notes that Nancy Pelosi's visit to the island "was designed to demonstrate support for the country in the face of what many in the US believe to be a growing threat of a Chinese invasion". Interestingly, you miss the real reason Pelosi went to Taipei – domestic politics. Pelosi and the Democrats fear they might lose the House (and she her role as the House speaker) in the upcoming midterm elections. The only topic Republicans and Democrats in the House both agree on is doubling down on China (and Russia). By flying to Taiwan, Pelosi wanted to demonstrate to her domestic audience that she is being "tougher" on China than her Republican colleagues. By doing so, she just might have set in motion an escalation that could yet prove fatal for the island.

Johan Boelts, Austria

Carbon juggernauts

To The Guardian

While acknowledging that aviation is a big contributor to carbon emissions, there seems to be a reticence around the subject of SUVs. A Guardian article published nearly two years ago quoted a study by the International Energy Agency, which showed that increasing demand for SUVs was the second-largest contributor to global carbon emissions from 2010 to 2018, and showed the graph with this information. It also showed that if SUV drivers were a country, they would be seventh in the world for carbon emissions. Why is this not being met head-on?

Rosie Clinton, Newcastle upon Tyne

A useless tax cut

To The Times

The biggest tax cut being proposed by Liz Truss is the reversal of the corporation tax increase from 19% to 25%, costing the Treasury £17bn a year. None of this money will benefit households.

The justification for doing this is that it will stimulate growth and companies will invest more. They have enjoyed reduced corporation tax rates since 2010, but there is no evidence that this has resulted in faster growth. What is more, labour productivity growth has stagnated because companies counter-intuitively invest more when tax rates are higher to mitigate their tax bill.

Michael Dangoor, London

Exchange of the week

What have they done to the rain?

To The Daily Telegraph

It's time for a serious conversation about water usage, rather than a knee-jerk call for hosepipe bans by the Environment Secretary George Eustice. Here in the South, water leakage rates are about 25%. So of the total water supplied only 75% is available. Commercial and agriculture use 90% of that water, leaving 10% for domestic customers.

According to Water UK, a hosepipe ban saves 10% of that water. Doing the sums shows a hosepipe ban saves only 0.75% of water supplied. As leaks account for 25% of water, Eustice should deal with the water suppliers, rather than imposing a hosepipe ban for metered water that we pay for already.

Larry Armitstead, Medstead, Hampshire

To The Daily Telegraph

Thames Water has been caught out by the worst drought in its region since 1976. In the first seven months of 1976, rainfall in the southeast was, according to the Met Office, less than 60% of this year. Such droughts used to be common. From 1920-1950, there were five years where rainfall in the first seven months was less than in 2022. From 1873-1970, the average rainfall in the southeast for the same period was 375mm; since 2000 it has risen by nearly 7% to 400mm. But the population of London has increased by more than 25%.

Perhaps the problem is not so much exceptional lack of rain, but a failure to plan for wholly predictable events.

Charles Duncan, St Mawes, Cornwall

To The Daily Telegraph

Here in the Thames Water area we are lucky. The CEO of our supplier is so good at her job that she has received a £727,000 bonus this year, in addition to her £2m salary. This must mean that we have no shortages, and that Thames Water is delivering the service I have paid for.

Bob Massingham, Bicester, Oxfordshire

Green light for mob rule

To The Guardian

I, like too many women, have experience of the bullying that Sonia Sodha mentions ("Don't buy the Stonewall line on gender identity"). I attended a peaceful, lawful Woman's Place UK meeting in Manchester last March, to support women in women's sports, all-women therapy settings and the need for single-sex prisons. The meeting was besieged by a hostile crowd of "trans rights demonstrators", who mounted a deafening barrage outside our building. Many women ran the gauntlet of this spitting, swearing crowd, who yelled vile insults at us and called for our deaths over megaphones. We continued our meeting, as police prevented the mob from entering the building, while our speakers raised their voices over the chants of "Nazi", "Scum" and "Fascist". I have never seen such hate in a public or political activity.

This is not just condoned by far too many liberals and leftists: the local newspaper reported favourably on the protest and a Manchester councillor and TUC president declared that our meeting should never have happened. As Sodha says, one day we will look back in wonder.

Josephine McKenna, Liverpool

Enraged customers

To The Daily Telegraph

[Re your article ('Don't take it out on our staff!': How did Britain become so angry?)], the simple answer is that often organisations will use methods to make certain actions as frustrating as possible to deter people. Most of the time, these are things like dealing with errors or complaints, cancelling services, or gaining access to key people. They may be confusing, time-consuming, or have onerous requirements to fulfil. It's little wonder that when a consumer finally does get through to a human being, they end up in a bad mood and often frustrated, dealing with a company representative who will often have little ability to resolve some of the more complex issues. Ultimately, organisations have ended up creating a system where everything is the customer's problem, taking little responsibility for the issues, and the people in such systems – the few in people-facing roles – end up bearing the full brunt of customer frustration.

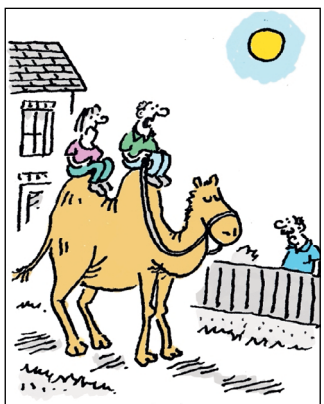
Christina Freeman, Dagenham, London

Cheap Tory brands

To the Financial Times

What is happening to the Conservative Party is like watching a familiar family department store fragment into franchises and concessions to brands whose fashionable appeal will run out. It struggles to be cut-price and high-end, yet traditionally classic while edgy and contemporary. The store fights for footfall in a world where we point and click our opinions as we expect next day delivery of a new phone. We recognise the Edwardian building as we drive past. Maybe, sooner than we think, the public will ask itself, "Are you being served?" Then footfall will count.

Simon Crosby, Aysgarth, North Yorkshire



"We're off to Hampshire for the weekend"

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Review of reviews: Books

Book of the week

Teller of the Unexpected

by Matthew Dennison

Head of Zeus 272pp £20

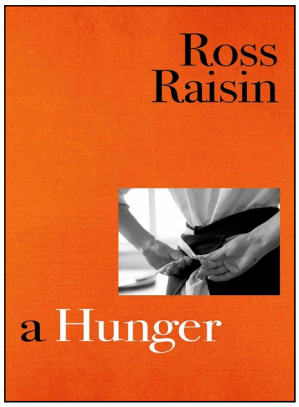
The Week Bookshop **£15.99**

Roald Dahl is "very easy to cast as a villain", said Tim Adams in The Observer. He was arrogant and overbearing, a "distant and wayward husband", and an "unforgivable anti-Semite". Yet he also brought delight to "tens of millions of children – myself included" – with his "joyful, wicked, silly, inventive" stories. Matthew Dennison follows Dahl's numerous previous biographers in attempting to "fill the gap between these polarities". While it offers "no new revelations or notable interviews", *Teller of the Unexpected* is a "well-researched" biography that turns the "baggy complications of Dahl's life into something brisk and manageable".

Dahl did at least have some excuse for his bad behaviour, said Roger Lewis in the Daily Mail: his life was "unremittingly traumatic". Born in Cardiff in 1916, he was just three when his eldest sister, Astri, died of a burst appendix. His father, a wealthy shipbroker originally from Norway, "dropped dead of grief" weeks later, leaving Dahl's mother to bring him and his three sisters up alone. At boarding school, Dahl was singled out because he was foreign and aloof – and subjected to remorseless beatings. Aged 18, having no wish to "prolong his experience of institutionalised learning", he took a job with Shell in east Africa, where he "quite took to the colonial life". When the Second World War broke out, Dahl enlisted with the RAF in Nairobi, but was badly injured after crash-landing in the Libyan desert.

Although he recovered sufficiently to see some action, said Claudia FitzHerbert in Literary Review, he spent the latter part of the War in the US, working for the British government as a cultural attaché. "The tall, handsome, injured airman was soon cutting a dash": it was said that he "slept with everyone on both the east and west coasts who had more than $50,000 a year". He also started writing, on the advice of C.S. Forester. Dahl married the actress Patricia Neal, and brought her back to England, where he became the familiar stooping figure in a cardigan with a cadaverous face and a writing shed in the garden. Wealth and fame followed, but so too did further tragedies, said Tanya Gold in The Daily Telegraph: Theo, his baby son, suffered a brain injury after being hit by a New York taxi; Olivia, his daughter, died of measles aged seven; Neal had a stroke in 1965, forcing Dahl to effectively become her carer. Dennison's book is "riveting, and immaculately written", but "despair" pervades Dahl's story. Reading it, "all I feel is pity, for a man so raging, and a boy so lost".

Novel of the week



A Hunger

by Ross Raisin

Jonathan Cape 464pp £18.99

The Week bookshop **£14.99**

Most books billed as telling us "what it means to be human" really do no such thing, said John Self in The Observer. Ross Raisin's *A Hunger* is an exception. The tale of a London "sous chef in her mid-50s", this is the fourth novel by this talented writer – and it is his most "ambitious" yet, encompassing "work and family, desires and appetites, responsibility and identity". Raisin has always excelled at portraying working lives, said Alexandra Harris in The Guardian: *Waterline*, his second novel, centred on a Clyde shipbuilder; *A Natural*, his third, was about a lower league footballer. Here, he captures the rhythms of kitchen life so skilfully that it "makes one realise the degree to which work is still under-charted territory in literary fiction". Yet the novel is about much more than cooking: Patrick, Anita's husband of 30 years, has recently developed early-onset dementia, forcing her to combine the stresses of her job with a new role as a carer "changing incontinence pads". The result is a "deeply thought out and beautifully unshowy" novel about the "conflicting demands of work and care".

I wasn't impressed, said Claire Lowdon in The Sunday Times. Although Raisin's gifts for "startling descriptive prose" are evident – notably in a bravura opening set in a walk-in fridge – the novel overall is let down by "wooden dialogue", characters who don't seem real, and a clumsy structure in which Anita's present-day travails are juxtaposed with "rushed and skimpy" scenes from her early life. It may not be perfect, but this is a deft exploration of "the guilt that accompanies female ambition", said Amber Medland in the FT. Daring in what it sets out to achieve, *A Hunger* is equally "impressive in its execution".

The Rise and Reign of the Mammals

by Steve Brusatte

Picador 528pp £20

The Week bookshop **£15.99**

In this beautifully written book, palaeontologist Steve Brusatte tells the epic tale of "how our forebears survived an apocalypse, and how their progeny rose up to rule the world", said Rhys Blakely in The Times. The early mammals have been neglected by scientists – dinosaurs have commanded more attention – but they prove "every bit as engaging as the reptiles from whom they inherited the Earth". He begins his account in the "steamy Carboniferous coal swamp, where our lineage first split from that of the reptiles". He then "sweeps through 325 million years of evolution", bringing to life an "extraordinary menagerie" – from "armadillos the size of cars to elephants the size of miniature poodles".

Brusatte "delights in telling us of a near-surreal explosion in giant forms that arose in the post-dinosaur world", said Mark Cocker in The Spectator. "Here are South American ground sloths the size of a Volkswagen Beetle", and "American felids with canines the length of sickles". Towards the end, the story becomes more familiar. Overall, Brusatte's book reminds us that *Homo sapiens* is just a "single point" among millions of mammal species.

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Drama & Music

Musical: Identical

Nottingham Playhouse to 14 Aug; The Lowry, Salford (19 Aug to 3 Sept). Running time: 2hrs 50mins ★★★★

Composer George Stiles and lyricist Anthony Drewe have had a huge hit with their stage version of *Mary Poppins*. Their latest family musical, *Identical*, is less firm on its feet but, thanks in part to the fine performances of its young stars, this tale of identical twins separated at birth has the makings of a "must-see phenomenon" even so, said Dominic Cavendish in The Daily Telegraph. From a script by Stuart Paterson that "closely honours" its source – Erich Kästner's 1949 novel *Das doppelte Lottchen* – it rises to a climax of genuine "theatrical wonder" in this production, produced by Kenny Wax and directed by former RSC supremo Trevor Nunn.

The young stars excel in a show full of "theatrical wonder"

For Disney's screen versions of Kästner's book – 1961's *The Parent Trap* and its 1998 remake – the action was relocated to the US and England. Here, it returns to its original Mitteleuropean setting. Having lived apart with divorced parents in Munich and Vienna, its ten-year-old heroines discover one another's existence when they meet by chance at a summer camp in Bavaria. The set-up is a bit plodding, making for an overlong first half. But after they resolve to swap places so that each can meet the parent she never knew, things take off, said Nick Ahad in The Guardian. Nunn brings out "both the farce and the fragility" in this complex family situation, said Georgina Brown in the Daily Mail. The sliding sets and video work lend the action a "movie-like" fluidity. And the acting is great, with three sets of twins playing the girls in rotation (Kyla and Nicole Fox were superb on the first night).

Sadly, the magic never happened for me, said Clive Davis in The Times. I felt the girls were let down by "limp" dialogue and "surprisingly slack" direction, and the show's visual brilliance only served to highlight the "cardboard quality" of the storytelling. It's "gooey" and undeniably far-fetched, said Quentin Letts in The Sunday Times, but such is "the alchemy of the stage musical" that I found myself blubbing. You may not warm to its "commercially savvy sentimentality", but if it extends after Nottingham and Salford it will, at least, help "cure the national drought".

The week's other opening

The Tempest *Shakespeare's Globe, London SE1 (020-7401 9919). Until 22 October*

With nods to *Love Island* and *The White Lotus*, director Sean Holmes resets *The Tempest* as a tropical package holiday gone wrong. At its best moments, it's "a riot", but the "power and grace" of Shakespeare's language are missing (Guardian).

Albums of the week: three new releases

Maggie Rogers: Surrender
Polydor
£8.99

Maggie Rogers has always had doubts about pop stardom. She got her break in 2016 when producer Pharrell Williams seized on one of her songs during a masterclass at New York University – but after her first album (a hit), she took time out to enrol for a master's at Harvard. "Unfortunately for her", she really does have a gift for songwriting, said Will Hodgkinson in The Times. There's nothing modish about this album, *Surrender* – it is "traditional widescreen rock", with lyrics about "the usual subjects" (love, sex, friendship). But it stands out precisely because Rogers isn't straining for effect – everything sounds "natural and unforced".

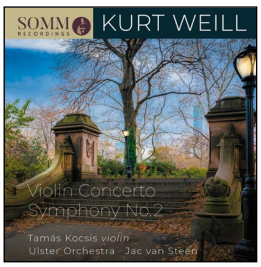
The songs are about submitting to "overwhelming urges and forces", "awakening from dormancy and plunging back into life", said Ludovic Hunter-Tilney in the FT. But alas, Rogers herself has surrendered here to "the emotional manipulations of mainstream pop". Her vocals have an "impassioned edge", but the overall effect doesn't really match "the lyrical sentiments of wanting to run wild".

Amanda Shires: Take It Like a Man
ATO Records
£12.99

A staple of the Nashville music scene since moving from her native Texas in 2004, Amanda Shires has long been seen as "a punk kind of country artist", standing up for "racial and gender inclusivity" in a conservative genre. Her seventh album makes her strongest statement yet, said Jenessa Williams in The Guardian: the songs challenge "antiquated" views of female roles, and assert that a woman of her age (she is 40) can be "more than just a character in someone else's life". There are "cheesy" passages, but it's mostly "rousing stuff", capturing both "sinful-lustful" sexual energy and signs of beguiling vulnerability.

The opening number, *Hawk for the Dove*, is "as broodingly carnal a track as you're going to hear this year", said Chris Willman in Variety, but the other songs reflect "darker, more doubting corners of a long-term relationship". Still, there are moments of humour, and musically the album draws in places on smoother sounds – such as the sweet piano, sad strings and soulful horns of 1950s "Countrypolitan" Nashville – to appealing effect.

Kurt Weill: Symphony No. 2, Violin Concerto
SOMM
£11



Compared with his "eternally popular theatre works", such as *The Threepenny Opera*, Kurt Weill's concert music is rather neglected. Perhaps we feel that the "real" Weill – so closely associated with the sights, sounds and spirit of 1920s Berlin – won't be found in a piece called Symphony or Concerto. But this "excellent" recording proves otherwise, said Ivan Hewett in The Daily Telegraph. Composed after he'd fled Nazi Germany, his *Second Symphony* is weighty and sophisticated, but his "familiar musical personality" – the bitter sarcasm, the "tender sweetness", the "big, defiant tunes" – blazes out nonetheless; and in the hands of the Ulster Orchestra under Jac van Steen, both aspects, "the populist and the high-art", are made to shine.

It should be performed more often, said Norman Lebrecht in The Critic – as should the *Violin Concerto*, which is beautifully rendered here with Tamás Kocsis as the soloist. Weill was an aspiring modernist in 1924 when he wrote this "brilliant" piece, and it sounds quite as "advanced" as Alban Berg's 1935 essay in the form.

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Stars reflect the overall quality of reviews and our own independent assessment (5 stars=don't miss; 1 star=don't bother)

Bullet Train

2hrs 6mins (15)

Tedious action film starring Brad Pitt as a laid-back hitman

★★

I'd love to be able to liken this film to one of the sleek, "unstoppably propulsive" bullet trains of its title, said Robbie Collin in The Daily Telegraph. Alas, it's more "the cinematic equivalent of the delayed 17:20 to Didcot Parkway", sitting somewhere outside Reading, with no air conditioning and the "See it, say it, sorted" announcement on repeat. In this woefully poor action movie, Brad Pitt plays Ladybug, a low-level assassin who is ordered by Sandra Bullock's handler to retrieve a briefcase full of money from a train whizzing from Tokyo to Kyoto. En route, he is assailed by a string of other killers, including an innocent-looking schoolgirl (Joey King) and two cockney goons (Aaron Taylor-Johnson and Brian Tyree Henry). The film's mostly computer-generated vision of Japan is "clankingly inauthentic", while the script "veers between edginess by committee – lots of swearing and wannabe Guy Ritchie riffing – and sometimes staggering laziness". Really, "take the bus".

With its star-studded cast and potentially thrilling premise, *Bullet Train* "must have made a great pitch", said Danny Leigh in the FT. "The problem is the execution: meandering and free of snap." Pitt is as watchable as ever – his hitman, who has recently come off a career break, drawls in a "therapy haze of self-help mantras"; but unfortunately that joke, like every other gag in the film, gets "worked to death". Well, I was entertained, said Matthew Bond in The Mail on Sunday. Yes, "it's all very convoluted" and it unfolds in a "wearying familiar style" reminiscent of Quentin Tarantino's better work, but it does improve as it goes along, and the visual effects "are, for the most part, pretty good". There's nothing special about the film, but it's perfectly serviceable "holiday fun".

Prey

1hr 40mins (16+)

Surprisingly good Predator *prequel set in 1719*

★★★★

Prequels make "my heart sink", said Wendy Ide in The Observer: all too often they're used just to "squeeze a little more juice out of an already dead and desiccated franchise". *Prey*, however, which revives the *Predator* series for a seventh outing, "is different". For one thing, it's set 300 years before the earlier films, on the Great Plains of North America, where Comanche life is presented in rich, authentic detail. Our heroine is Naru (Amber Midthunder), a warrior whose prodigious survival skills are put to the test when an alien creature starts killing everything in its path. To director Dan Trachtenberg's credit, the film "stays true to the essence" of the 1987 original – it's "stylishly violent, stickily graphic" and "impossibly tense" – while also succeeding "as a self-contained entity".

I was impressed by this addition to the franchise, said Benjamin Lee in The Guardian. "It feels genuinely new to see a genre film of this scale" anchored by an Indigenous American cast. This is not just a victory of representation; it also ensures that a story "we've seen a few too many times before" is told in an interestingly fresh way. It's just a shame that the film, which is beautifully shot, and has some "intricate, well choreographed" action sequences, is going straight to Disney+. What I liked about this "audacious action flick" is that it reinforces the forgotten value of "dramatic jeopardy", said Kevin Maher in The Times. Its characters are seen "in actual danger of harm, injury or even death, rather than just punching stuff repeatedly for two hours while wearing a superhero costume". Of course Midthunder's stellar performance helps too; in a few short scenes, she conveys so much about Naru that when the "great big bloody predator" swoops to get her, we "really care".

Luck

1hr 45mins (PG)

Lacklustre animation about a teenager on a quest to find a lucky penny

★★

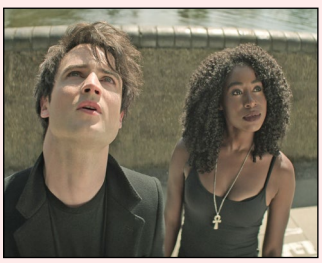
Luck arrives "with no shortage of fanfare", said Francesca Steele in The i Paper. "It is Apple TV+'s first animated feature, and also the first film produced by the Pixar co-founder and animation superstar John Lasseter since he left the studio five years ago, following (unproven) reports of inappropriate behaviour." It's made by an experienced team, and has a cast that includes Simon Pegg, Jane Fonda and Whoopi Goldberg. So on paper, "the stars are aligned" – and yet the film itself is a disappointment. Eva Noblezada plays Sam, a teenager who has just left care, who follows a black cat (Simon Pegg) through a portal to the "land of luck". Here, they resolve to find a lucky penny that could ensure that Sam's long history of ill-fortune comes to an end – and the film becomes "a slog", marred by endless clichés about leprechauns, and animation that is reminiscent of "a badly designed video game". Let's hope that Lasseter has better luck next time.

What a "dismal, algorithmically produced" mess this is, said Peter Bradshaw in The Guardian. "The quirky high concept plays like a pound-shop knock-off of *Inside Out* and *Soul*"; as for the script, it is "utterly zingless" and ties itself in pointless "theological knots". Children deserve better. It's a shame it doesn't work, said Alistair Harkness in The Scotsman. The "charming opening act" provides a glimpse of the smart, *Monsters Inc.*-style adventure this could have been; but that promise is squandered by a lack of coherent ideas. At one point you can "feel the story gears grinding" as the makers seek to cram in high-stakes action while imparting unintelligible "life lessons".

The Sandman: Neil Gaiman's "unfilmable" graphic novel comes to Netflix

"*The Sandman* has long been perceived as the ultimate 'unfilmable' comic book," said Ed Power in The Daily Telegraph. Neil Gaiman's opus, which was published by DC Comics from 1989 to 1996, surfs a zigzag, "dreamlike logic"; its characters "hopscotch between timelines"; and its "sheer 80s goth glumness leaves no space for Marvel-type quips". Yet these qualities have miraculously been preserved in Netflix's "gripping" ten-part series, developed by Gaiman and David S. Goyer.

In a cast that is "the stuff of dreams", Tom Sturridge plays the mooching Sandman himself, an immortal who rules over the realm of dreams until he is captured by wizard Roderick Burgess (Charles Dance). From there, the action "leaps all over the place – spanning time, dimensions and genre"; and the result, for the most part, "is as authentic an adaptation as might be reasonably expected. For Gaiman fans, it's finally game on."



A cast that is "the stuff of dreams"

The "mood lighting" and portentous tone can get wearying, said Hugo Rifkind in The Times. But it's "slick and extremely beautiful", and once Jenna Coleman arrives it starts to feel a bit like *Doctor Who*, "but smarter". I have not read the comics, but if it carries on in this vein, "I'm in".

I found the whole thing "underwhelming", said Dan Einav in the FT. Subplots aren't fleshed out properly, and dialogue is limited to functional statements in which characters bluntly state who they are and what they intend to do. Still, it is fitting that a show "about the 'king of dreams' seems so well equipped to send viewers to sleep."

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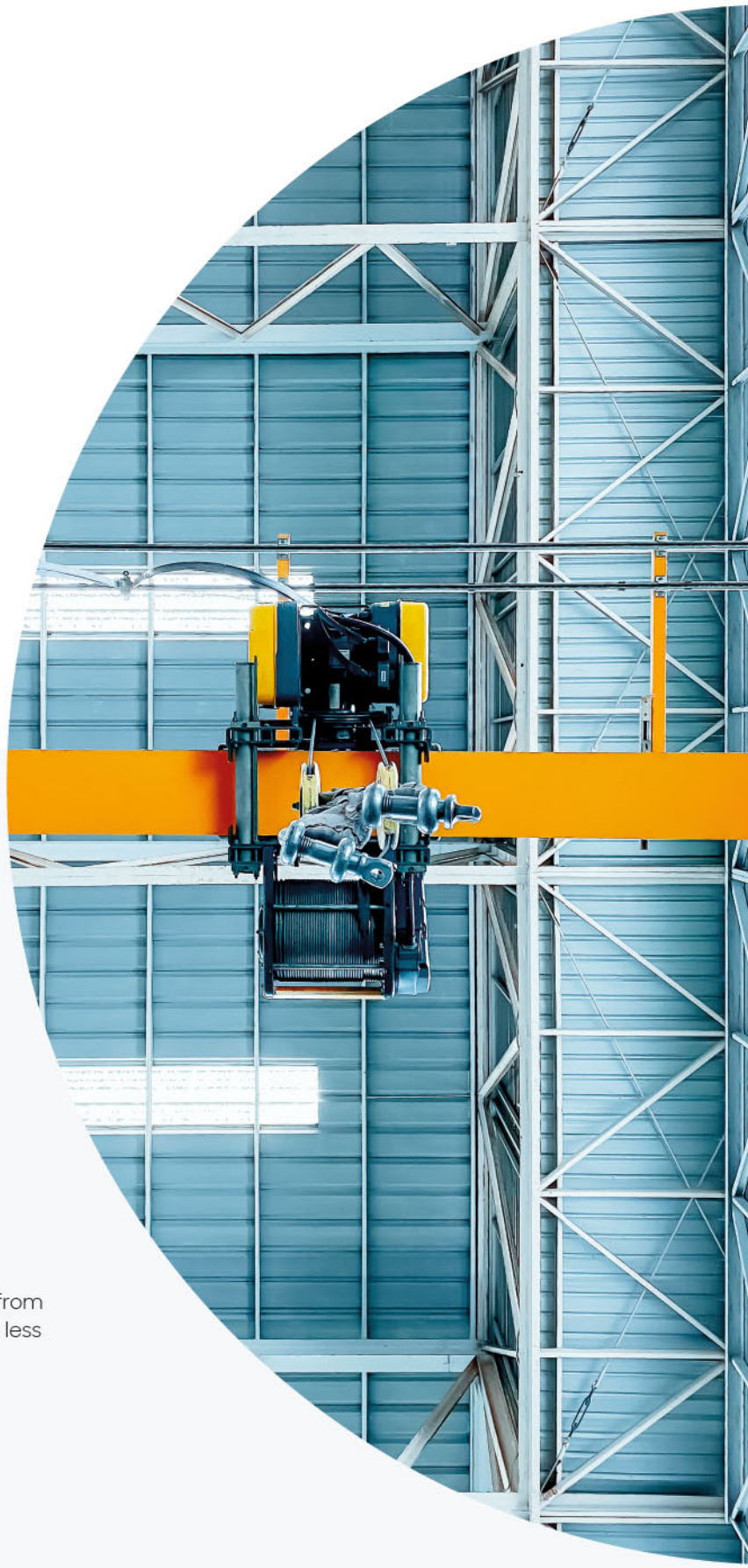

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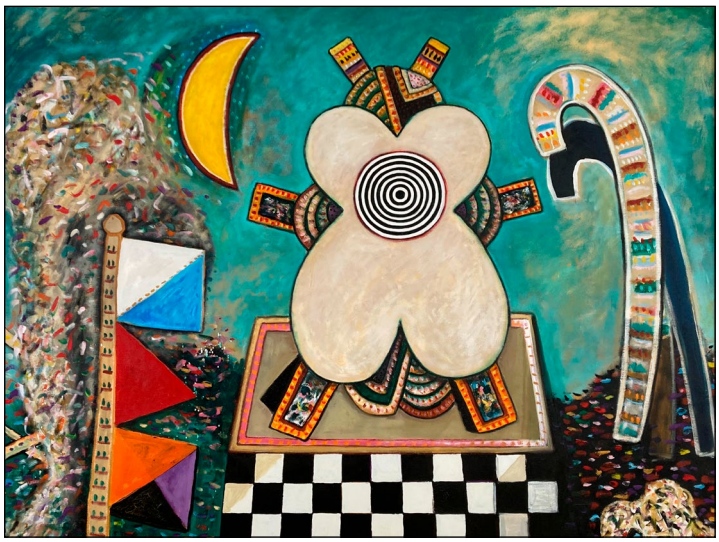
Exhibition of the week **Edinburgh Art Festival 2022**

Various locations, Edinburgh and surrounding areas. (0131-226 6558, edinburghartfestival.com). Until 28 August

In its 18th iteration, the Edinburgh Art Festival is, as usual, an "eclectic" affair, "ranging from the historic to the ultra-contemporary", said Gabrielle Schwarz in The Daily Telegraph. A loose grouping of the many exhibitions running across the city at the same time as the wider Edinburgh Fringe, the festival features everything from a scholarly exhibition of impressionist paintings at the Scottish National Gallery to a show at Inverleith House, where artist duo Cooking Sections propose to tell visitors' fortunes through "oyster readings". Between these two poles, we are treated to postwar photography, contemporary sculpture and video pieces, and even a former bottle shop that the Dutch artist Jeanne van Heeswijk has converted into a space for "a month-long programme of restorative activities such as juice-making, yoga and mindfulness".



Alan Davie's Mama Idol (1976): "an artist of biting power"

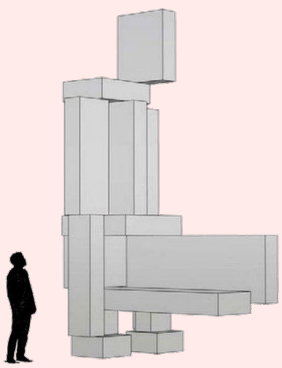
At its best, the festival is thrilling, said Laura Freeman in The Times. Jupiter Artland, a "sublimely strange" sculpture park outside Edinburgh, is displaying *I Lay Here for You* (below), an enormous bronze of a female body lying prone, by Tracey Emin. "If you still have Emin down as the messy-bed woman, this monumental bronze ought to convince you that when it comes to depicting the human body, Emin is the heir to Rodin." Better still is *A Taste for Impressionism* at the Scottish National Gallery, a "ravishing" exhibition that features Gauguin's *Vision of the Sermon* and Matisse's magnificent *Jazz* sequence, by way of Monet, Vuillard and a fair few of Degas's "absinthe-limbed dancers". The show's "big reveal" is a probable van Gogh self-portrait, discovered beneath the surface of the artist's *Head of a Peasant Woman* when the curators were researching the show. Elsewhere, however, the programme is often "exasperating": many shows are heavy on convoluted art-speak. Expect pretentious work exploring "the current neoliberal capitalist landscape" and the like.

There's some risible stuff here, agreed Jonathan Jones in The Guardian. The nadir is probably to be found at Collective Gallery on Calton Hill, where we are treated to a "Marxist cartoon" in which the Scottish-born tycoon and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie is "berated" for his "ruthless capitalism" by Dippy, the Diplodocus whose skeleton he famously bought; the animation, created by artist Ruth Ewan, is "as crap as the argument is one-sided". Thankfully, however, things get better: at the Stills photography centre, there is a "shattering" show devoted to the "shockingly intimate" work of Japanese photographer Ishiuchi Miyako. Among the highlights is a series of images documenting the charred and ripped clothes worn by victims of the 1945 Hiroshima bombing, an "eerily beautiful" body of work that casts a "genuinely fresh perspective" on a well-documented tragedy. Almost as affecting is a retrospective devoted to the Scottish modernist Alan Davie, on show at Dovecot Studios. Although considered somewhat retrograde at the time of his death in 2014, his "rough", "spattery" paintings confirm him as "an artist of biting power" – "Scotland's Jackson Pollock". For all its faults – and there are many – there is "real depth" to parts of this art festival. If nothing else, it presents a fantastic "excuse to explore one of Europe's most remarkable cities".

News from the art world

The Elgin Marbles: is a deal in sight?

After more than 200 years in the UK, the Elgin Marbles may finally return to Greece, say Sarah Baxter and Liam Kelly in The Sunday Times. In a gesture that could solve one of the world's "most controversial cultural disputes", the British Museum is calling for a "Parthenon partnership", which could allow the 2,450-year-old masterpieces to go to Athens on loan. The marbles – a 75-metre long frieze and various panels and statues – were removed from the Acropolis in 1801 by Thomas Bruce, Lord Elgin, before becoming the property of the British Museum. The legality of their removal has been disputed ever since. Greece first requested their return in 1983, and though previous attempts to agree a loan have come to nothing, there is now scope for a "positive conversation" between the claimants, according to deputy director Jonathan Williams. It will take a "Herculean effort to reach a deal" while the Museum insists that the marbles remain a part of its collection – a position Athens rejects. But "the endgame has begun".



Gormley's suggestive haunches

Gormley's "phallic" statue

Students at Imperial College London want to prevent the installation of a sculpture by Antony Gormley because of concerns that the work could be perceived as "phallic", says Kabir Jhala in The Art Newspaper. Entitled *Alert*, the sculpture is "a six-metre-high stack of cantilevered steel blocks", which the artist says is intended to resemble a human figure "squatting on its haunches". However, some students see it differently, comparing its long central block – representing "a protruding knee" – to a "sizeable erect penis". Even the work's title has come in for criticism: "The name Alert could also be understood as referring to the statue's phallus being erect," said the Imperial College Union. Students also complain that they were not consulted about the installation of the statue, which will occupy a prime spot on a new plaza at the college. This isn't the first time Gormley's sculptures have been interpreted in this way: last year, locals at Aldeburgh in Suffolk likened a group of his sculptures installed on a beach in the town to "sex toys".

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Best books... Oliver Bullough

The author and journalist chooses his favourite books. He will speak about his latest, the Sunday Times bestseller Butler to the World *(Profile £20), at the Edinburgh International Book Festival on 25 August (edbookfest.co.uk)*

The Calculus Affair by Hergé, 1956 (Egmont £7.99). I don't know what made a farm boy from mid-Wales obsessed with Eastern Europe, but it may have been Tintin's adventures in Syldavia and Borduria. He never filed a story, but – "by the whiskers of Kûrvi-Tasch!" – who wouldn't want to be a reporter after reading this?

Eastern Approaches by Fitzroy Maclean, 1949 (Penguin £12.99). Maclean is a real-life Tintin. I spent much of my late teens and early 20s following him to Vis in Croatia, Bukhara in Uzbekistan, and many other places besides. He is the perfect guide for adventure, as well as a witness to some of the 20th century's most dramatic moments.

Moscow Stations by Venedikt Yerofeev, 1973 (Faber £8.99). This boozy, surreal and loving little book is not as well-known as the giants of Russian literature, but it captures the Russia I lived in better than many more writerly works. It's a tough one to translate, but Stephen Mulrine does a very good job.

Essays by George Orwell, 2013 (Everyman's Library £14.99). I write non-fiction, and mostly read non-fiction, and if I need reminding that it doesn't have to plod, I open Orwell's essays. They're everything good writing should be, as well as a reminder that, just because something's serious, doesn't mean it can't be funny.

Albert Speer: His Battle with Truth by Gitta Sereny, 1995 (Picador £20). This biography of Hitler's architect is the only non-fiction book I have read that hit me like a great novel. Its ambition and vision are vast, and it magnificently fulfils both.

The Aubrey-Maturin novels by Patrick O'Brian, 1969-1999 (HarperCollins £9.99 each). When life gets on top of me, I go sailing with Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin. I wish I'd never read these books, so I could discover O'Brian's world again for the first time.

Titles in print are available from The Week Bookshop on 020-3176 3835. For out-of-print books visit biblio.co.uk

The Week's guide to what's worth seeing

Showing now

A rediscovered van Gogh self-portrait is the centrepiece of **A Taste for Impressionism: Modern French Art from Millet to Matisse**, which looks at how Scotland became home to masterpieces by Gauguin, Monet et al. Until 13 November, Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh (nationalgalleries.org).

Terry Gilliam and choreographer Leah Hausman co-direct a playful new production of Sondheim's musical **Into the Woods**, which weaves together the plots of several Grimm fairy tales. 17 August-10 September, Theatre Royal Bath (theatreroyal.org.uk).

Book now

Cezanne brings together the still lifes and landscapes of the painter's native Provence; several of the works are on display in the UK for the first time. 5 October-12 March 2023, Tate Modern, London SE1 (tate.org.uk).

Fly With Me will celebrate the Afghan art of kite-flying across 11 UK cities. Organised by Good Chance Theatre (makers of last year's giant Amal puppet), the one-day festival will include music, dance and storytelling. 20 August, in Glasgow, Manchester, Sheffield, Brighton and beyond (goodchance.org.uk/flywithme).

Fly with Me: celebrating kite-flying

The Crown's Erin Doherty is starring in a new production of **The Crucible**, Arthur Miller's perennially powerful, gripping drama about the Salem Witch Trials. 14 September-5 November, National Theatre, London SE1 (nationaltheatre.org.uk).

The Archers: what happened last week

As they walk the new course at the Stables, Shula and Alice discover that Justin has meddled with the design. Peggy visits the twins and decides to mark their birth with a stained-glass window in St Stephen's. There's a bumper turnout for the Grey Gables launch event and everyone is impressed by Adil's commitment to Ambridge. While Caitlin continues to ruffle feathers at Bridge Farm, Helen is hurt by Peggy's decision to celebrate the twins, but not her sons. People are asking questions about the postbox fire but Susan keeps schtum. Oliver tells Tracy he'd like to cover Brad's expenses on the maths course. Adil and Justin notice Ruby is listless and rush her to the vet, where Alistair discovers a tumour. Next day, Alistair and Denise successfully operate and celebrate with lunch together. Helen apologises to Tom for being oversensitive about the window, but he says he and Natasha will refuse Peggy's offer. As they discuss the Stables, Shula tells Lilian she's considering a move to an inner-city parish. Lynda and Lilian admit how wrong they were about Adil.

Television

Programmes

Griff's Canadian Adventure This six-part series sees Griff Rhys Jones travel across the world's second largest country, starting his journey in Newfoundland. Sat 13 Aug, C4 21:00 (60mins).

Afghanistan: Getting Out Documentary charting the attempts by successive governments to end the two-decade war in Afghanistan. US General David Petraeus and David Cameron are among the interviewees. Sun 14 Aug, BBC2 21:00 (60mins).

Marriage New family drama starring Sean Bean and Nicola Walker as a couple returning to real life after a holiday. Sun 14 and Mon 15 Aug, BBC1 21:00 (60mins each).

Britain's Secret War Babies Documentary following two Britons, fathered by African-American GIs stationed in Britain during the War, as they uncover their heritage and are reunited with relations in the US. Wed 17 Aug, C4 21:00 (90mins).

Films

Who You Think I Am (2019) Twisting romantic thriller about a fiftysomething woman (Juliette Binoche) who creates a fake social media profile to spy on her lover. In French with subtitles. Sat 13 Aug, BBC4 21:00 (95mins).

The Conversation (1974) Francis Ford Coppola's classic psychological thriller stars Gene Hackman as the surveillance expert drawn into a murder plot. Tue 16 Aug, BBC2 23:15 (110mins).

The Assistant (2019) Intense drama set over one day in the working life of a low-level film production assistant (Julia Garner). Wed 17 Aug, Film4 23:00 (105mins).

New to subscription TV

Irma Vep "Addictively absorbing" drama about a disillusioned Hollywood star who goes to Paris to make a vampire film (Daily Telegraph). On Sky Atlantic.

Bad Sisters Comedy thriller about five Irish sisters, bound by the early deaths of their parents. With Anne-Marie Duff and Sharon Horgan. From 17 Aug, on Apple TV+.

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Scenic hideaways

▲ **Northumberland:** Bendor Signal Box, Wooler. The original signal box served Akeld station from 1884, and today sits surrounded by glorious and peaceful Northumberland countryside. With planning permission for a two-bed property retaining the original structure. £150,000; Finest Properties (01434-622234).

▶ **Hampshire:** Longstock, Stockbridge. An idyllic riverside property with fishing rights on the River Test. Main suite, 3 further beds, family bath, shower room, kitchen/ breakfast room, 4 receps, conservatory, glasshouse, gardens, fishing lodge, garage. £2.95m; Savills (01962-841842).

◀ **Essex:** Tea Caddy, Higham, Colchester. Charmingly situated in Constable Country by the lush countryside of the Stour Valley, this three-storey Grade II property dates back to 1818. Main suite, 1 further bed, family bath, kitchen, recep with open fireplace, garden, garage. £550,000; Savills (01473-234800).

▲ **North Ayrshire:** Isle of Arran. A rare opportunity to buy an island with the former lighthouse keeper's accommodation. 5 beds, family bath, kitchen, 2 receps; self-contained cottage: 1 bed, shower room, kitchen, recep. Outbuildings, garden, stone jetty, helipad. OIEO £350,00; Knight Frank (020-7629 8171).

▶ **Powys:** Penymaes House, Hay-on-Wye. An elegant Victorian house nestled in mature gardens. Main suite, 6 further beds, family bath, kitchen, dining room, 3 receps, cellar, conservatory, coach house, gardens, parking. £1.5m; Strutt & Parker (01584-873711).

▲ **Warwickshire:** Beehive Cottage, Lavender Hall Lane, Berkswell. A 17th century thatched cottage on The Heart of England Way walking route. Main suite, guest suite, kitchen/dining room, recep, office/garden room, garden. £550,000; Fine & Country (02476-500015).

◀ **Gloucestershire:** Brassmills, Newent, Malswick. An impressive period house surrounded by woodland, with a stream and mill pond. Main suite, 5 further beds, 2 baths, kitchen/breakfast room, 4 receps, 2-storey outbuilding with conversion potential, gardens, parking. £1.375m; Fine & Country (01989-764141).

▲ **Yorkshire:** Easby Richmond. An architect-designed timber lodge in a lakeside setting. 3 beds (1 en suite), family bath, shower room, open plan kitchen/dining/living room. Shared facilities include a tennis court, hot tub and sauna. £320,000; Savills (01904-617821).

▲ **Gwynedd:** Cwm Cewydd, Machynlleth. Set in 5 acres of land in Snowdonia National Park with glorious views over the surrounding countryside. Main suite, 3 further beds (1 en suite), shower room, kitchen, 2 receps, snug, garden, parking. £585,000; Fine & Country (01938-531006).

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What the experts say

"Hacks" to make food last longer

Herbs are expensive, and often rot before you get around to using them. To make them last, said Prudence Wade on The Independent, cut off the stalks, put them in a glass of water, and store them in the fridge. (They'll last even longer if you put a sandwich bag over the top.) Similarly, celery and carrots will stay crunchy if you cut them into sticks and submerge them in water. Rather than binning stale bread, run it briefly under a tap, then put it in the oven for a few minutes: it should come out tasting "fluffy and fresh". Berries will last longer if you wash them in a solution of three-parts water, one-part vinegar; dry them off, then store them in a paper-towel-lined tub. If fruit is on the turn, put it in the freezer: it'll be perfect in a smoothie later (the same goes for greens). More foods can be frozen than people realise, said Jack Rear in The Daily Telegraph. Grated cheddar cheese can go in the freezer, for use on pizzas and so on. Eggs can be frozen, though not in their shells: freeze the whites and yolks separately. Freeze peeled boiled potatoes, and use them later to make roasties. In a good freezer, most food will last months. Don't worry if it gets freezer burn. It may affect the quality, but it's not dangerous.

Fine dining goes global in London

For most of the last century, fine dining was synonymous with France, says

Fine dining at the Michelin-starred Kol

Tomé Morrissey-Swan in The Daily Telegraph. Then, in the 1990s, it began to be "infiltrated" by other cuisines: first mainly those of other European countries, and then Japan. Now, the club is expanding to include Latin America and Africa, "continents whose cuisines have often been ignored in the upper echelons of the food world". This is particularly evident in London. The capital is home to the two-Michelin-starred restaurant Ikoyi, where the menu takes inspiration from West Africa; and Kol, a Mexican restaurant with one star. These two were among only five British restaurants to make it into the "extended 100" list at last month's The World's 50 Best Restaurant awards. In London you'll also find Stork, which specialises in modern pan-African cuisine, and the two-Michelin-starred Da Terra, where the cooking draws on the Brazilian heritage of its chef, Rafael Cagali. "People want to try different things," he says. "They already know what they'll find at a two-star French restaurant."

Two ways with watermelon

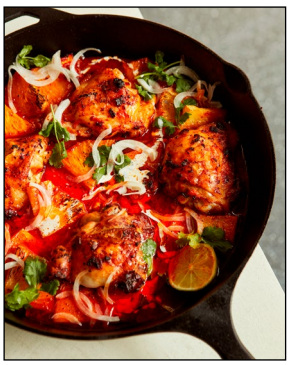
It's watermelon season, and there are plenty of ways to enjoy the fruit besides simply cutting it up and eating it, said Ed Smith in The Times. I like to cut fridge-cold watermelon into slices, and dust it generously with a spice mix made from toasted and ground coriander, fennel seeds, sumac, flaky sea salt and Aleppo pepper. Then squeeze over some lime juice and finally drizzle generously with runny honey; it's perfect for a barbecue. In many countries, watermelon rind is used to make a preserve, said Tom Hunt in The Guardian: wash and roughly chop about 500g of rind (with the skin if it's organic), then pulse blend into rough shards. Put in a pan with 400g sugar, the juice of three limes, and 1 tbsp of grated unpeeled ginger. Bring to the boil, stirring to dissolve the sugar, then simmer for 45 minutes or so, until "the mix is sticky and marmalade-like and the rind has turned translucent". It's excellent on toast, yoghurt or pancakes, or as a condiment.

Recipe of the week: chicken, pineapple and 'nduja bake

I love the combination of sweet and savoury, says Ixta Belfrage, and there is no greater union than that of pork and pineapple. The pork here comes in the form of 'nduja, a spreadable chilli-spiked sausage from Calabria. Add chicken, pineapple, chipotle and tangerine to the mix and you've got yourself a party.

Serves 4 4 skin-on, bone-in chicken thighs, at room temperature 4 cloves of garlic, peeled and crushed with the side of a knife 1 medium onion, halved and very thinly sliced on a mandolin ½ a large, extra-ripe pineapple, peeled (300g) 4 sweet tangerines (or 2 oranges), squeezed to get 100g juice (see notes) 100g chicken bone broth, stock or water 2 tbsp double cream 5g fresh coriander 1 lime, cut into wedges ***for the 'nduja and chipotle paste:*** *50g 'nduja paste/spread 2 tbsp olive oil 2 tsp tomato purée/paste ½ tsp chipotle flakes ½ tsp paprika ¾ tsp fine salt about 20 twists of freshly ground black pepper*

- Preheat the oven to 180°C fan/200°C.
- Put all the ingredients for the paste into a large bowl and mix. Add the chicken, garlic and three-quarters of the onion and mix well so everything is coated evenly. Tip this into a 28cm ovenproof cast iron skillet or similar-sized baking dish and spread out. Organise the chicken thighs on top, skin-side up and spaced apart.
- Cut the pineapple into 4 rounds, then cut each round into quarters, removing the hard core (you should have about 300g). Add the pineapple to the bowl with the remnants of the paste, mix to coat with whatever is left there, then arrange the pineapple around the chicken.
- Pour the tangerine juice around the chicken (don't get the skin wet), then bake for 20mins. Remove from the oven and pour the stock or water into the pan around the chicken (again, don't get the skin wet). Return to the oven for another 20-25mins, or until the chicken is cooked through and the skin is browned and crispy. If you have a blowtorch, use it to char the pineapple a little.



- Drizzle the cream into the sauce. Toss the coriander and the remaining onions together with a tiny bit of oil and salt and arrange on top. Serve from the pan, with the lime wedges alongside.
- ***Notes:*** I use tangerines over oranges as they have a more complex flavour, but oranges can be used if easier (use fresh fruit, though, not juice from a carton). If your tangerines/oranges aren't particularly sweet, you may want to add some maple syrup or honey – do this when you add the stock or water.

Taken from Mezcla by Ixta Belfrage, *published by Ebury Press at £26. Photography by Yuki Sugiura. To buy from The Week Bookshop for £20.99, call 020-3176 3835 or visit theweekbookshop.co.uk.*

Consumer

New cars: what the critics say

Citroën C5 Aircross 2022
Price: from £26,175

Autocar
Citroën's comfortable family-friendly SUV has been treated to a minor midlife facelift. It's been made sharper-looking, with a new grille and headlights, plus re-profiled bumpers, LED rear lights and new alloy wheels. Under the bonnet, however, the car is mostly unchanged. The steering is still light and a bit lifeless, but overall grip levels are actually quite high and body roll is well checked.

Car Magazine
The cheapest engine is the familiar 1.2 litre PureTech turbo triple that comes with either a six-speed manual or eight-speed automatic gearbox. With just 127bhp, it manages a respectable 0-62mph time of 10.3 seconds. There's also a far torquier 1.5 litre diesel option, but it's the 222bhp plug-in hybrid that has the cheapest running costs. Like the pure petrol and diesel, it is front-wheel drive.

Auto Express
All versions get Citroën's Progressive Hydraulic Cushions, but sharp imperfections can still be felt. Inside there's a new 10-inch infotainment screen. It is responsive – but frustratingly, you have to enter a sub-menu to adjust the air con. There's extra squishiness in the seats, but they are still only vaguely supportive. Rear sliding seats mean you can focus on either passenger space or boot capacity.

The best... filter water jugs

▶ **TAPP Water PitcherPro** This 1.45 litre glass pitcher promises to filter chlorine, limescale and 80 other substances, while preserving minerals (£34; amazon.co.uk).

▲ **ZeroWater 10-Cup Water Filter** With a 5-stage filter, this jug claims to remove 99% of chlorine to produce exceptionally clean water. It is also designed to be spill-free (£34; robertdyas.co.uk).

▶ **Brita Flow Water Filter Tank** For heavy consumers of water, or big families, this Brita tank holds a mighty 8.2 litres. The tap at the bottom works smoothly and the recyclable filter is easy to install (£50; argos.co.uk).

◀ **pH Replenish Glass Alkaline Filter** This glass jug raises the pH of tap water; it also filters out bacteria, lead, aluminium and chlorine and adds iron, zinc and calcium. Each filter lasts an average of 106 days (reduced from £45 to £40; amazon.co.uk).

▼ **Eau Carafe** This hand-blown carafe uses a traditional Japanese charcoal method to remove impurities and add minerals. For it to work, the water has to sit for at least an hour (£37; black-blum.com).

SOURCES: THE DAILY TELEGRAPH/BBC GOOD FOOD

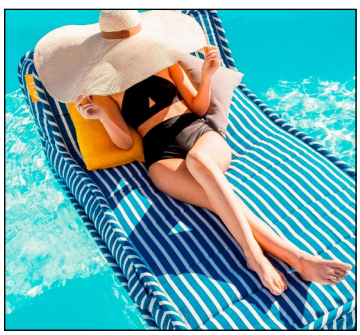
Apps... the best investment-trading apps

- **eToro** enables its users to trade in traditional assets – stocks and commodities – and new ones such as bitcoin. Users can also follow trades of experienced investors, with zero commission.
- **Freetrade**'s basic service offers commission-free trading with access to stocks in the UK and US, plus IPOs and companies on some European markets.
- With **Fidelity Personal Investing**, investors can choose from over 2,500 funds, plus stocks on the FTSE 100, 250, All-Share and AIM 100 markets and some Irish shares.
- **Trading212** offers unlimited commission-free trades with access to more than 10,000 stocks and ETFs from around the world. Users can start with a free virtual account.
- **IG** has access to 17,000 global markets, covering shares, indices, options and commodities with interactive charts, news, trading alerts and real-time signals.

All FCA regulated; free to download on iOS and Android.

SOURCE: FORBES

And for those who have everything...



Oliver James makes the world's most luxurious lilos from striking, durable fabrics engineered to withstand damage caused by chlorine, salt water and sunlight. The lilos come with a USB rechargeable pump and a storage bag.
from £730; oliverjameslilos.com

SOURCE: COUNTRY LIFE

Where to find... the best new paint collections

Interior designer Tim Gosling has teamed up with eco paint company **Graphenstone** to create The Restoration Chateau range of bold but harmonious colours (from £23.50/litre; graphenstone-ecopaints.store).

Edward Bulmer has recently released two new colours, a rarity for the natural-paint maker. Mason Pink is a pale but subtly earthy neutral pink; and Pippin is a yellowy green with a hint of black (from £51 for 2.5 litres; edwardbulmerpaint.co.uk).

Wallpaper and fabric designer **Morris & Co.** has launched its first paint range with 40 heritage hues drawn from an archive of William Morris designs (from £57 for 2.5 litres; morrisandco.sandersondesigngroup.com).

Launched by Cassandra Ellis four years ago, **Atelier Ellis**'s 76-strong paint chart consists solely of colours that are said to create a soothing, cocooning effect. Ellis creates a seasonal palette each month (from £51 for 2.5 litres; atelierellis.co.uk).

SOURCE: THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

This week's dream: wildlife spotting in the wetlands of Brazil

Spread across an area the size of Great Britain, the Pantanal, in southwest Brazil, is the world's largest tropical wetland. It is the best place on Earth to see jaguars, and home to a dazzling array of other wildlife too, says Lisa Grainger in The Times. Go in the dry season, between April and October; you can fly to the city of Campo Grande, and from there get a prop plane to one of the region's excellent lodges. Among them is Casa Caiman, a terracotta-tiled estancia with a swimming pool. Set in a privately-owned 74,000 acre ecological reserve, it plays host to Onçafari, a wildlife organisation devoted to jaguar preservation and research.

The Pantanal: the world's largest tropical wetland

Seeing a jaguar in the wild is "more thrilling" than spotting a lion in Africa, because the cats are so elusive. Unlike lions, they live alone, and, with only about 15,000 left in the wild – fewer than were killed annually in the 1960s for their fur – they are wary of humans. Even so, the number of sightings each year at Casa Caiman has increased from 35 to 1,075 in the past decade, and 99% of visitors now spot one. Not that the cats' future is secure even here. Both water and forest cover are dwindling because of farming – and the diversion of rivers for large-scale soy farms to the north. "If soy farms come to the Pantanal – which is currently the big threat – it will be game over," says Roberto Klabin, the reserve's owner.

For now, though, there's something to see wherever you go on the reserve. Guests strike out on horseback, on foot, and in jeeps, and always in the company of naturalist guides. Among the stars of the show are pumas, "prehistoric-looking" armadillos and long-haired giant anteaters – along with 120 other mammal species – and the birdlife is still more spectacular, ranging from ostrich-like rheas to great flocks of "luminous blue" hyacinth macaws. *Specialist tour operators include Joro Experiences (joroexperiences.com), Dehouche (dehouche.com) and Plan South America (plansouthamerica.com).*

Hotel of the week

Middleton Lodge
North Yorkshire

Situated outside the lovely old town of Richmond, this "perfect" Georgian estate first opened as a hotel in 2013, says Fiona Duncan in The Sunday Telegraph. Rooms occupy converted outbuildings (the main house is reserved for weddings), with "very natural" interiors (oak doors, linen curtains, neutral colours). Some have private terraces and tin hot tubs, and there are three "charming" shepherd huts in the orchard. Food is fresh and well-presented, and there's a pleasant spa. Best of all, though, is the two-acre walled garden – "beyond beautiful" since its recent restoration by Tom Stuart-Smith.

Doubles from £270 b&b; middletonlodge.co.uk.

Getting the flavour of…

A glorious train journey in Spain

With its comfortable cabins and dining car full of polished brass and wood, the Costa Verde Express evokes fantasies of a "golden age of travel" on its six-day, 400-mile odyssey along Spain's glorious north coast, says Oliver Smith in The Sunday Times. Plying a network of narrow-gauge lines, it wends at a delightfully slow pace along wild beaches, through orchards and mossy ravines and past the spectacular karst summits of the Picos de Europa. The landscape here is as verdant as its name suggests, and each day, there are tours of "handsome" old towns, such as Oviedo and Avilés, with plenty of Romanesque churches, bishops' palaces and excellent "grub and booze". The food is also good on board the train, where your fellow passengers are likely to be mainly visitors from elsewhere in Spain and Latin America. *Wexas Travel (wexas.com) has a seven-night trip from £4,345pp including flights.*

Springtime in Sicily

Perched on a cliff between Mount Etna and the sea, the tiny Sicilian town of Taormina is a true marvel, says Mariella Frostrup in The Daily Telegraph. Illustrious visitors from Goethe to Garbo have sung its praises; Guy de Maupassant adored it, and D.H. Lawrence stayed here for four years: he wrote *Lady Chatterley's Lover* on the "lemon-scented" terrace of the Grand Hotel Timeo. The hotel still exists (now part of the Belmond Group) and it's worth staying there if you can. There is also a Four Seasons, which occupies an old monastery. The best time to visit is in spring, before the hordes of summer invade, obscuring the town's charms. On the walk up to the volcano, snow is likely to still be fringing the black lava-strewn paths – creating a dramatic, monochrome effect – but down on the coast, perhaps at the pebble beach at Spiaggia di Mazzeo, the sea should already be warm enough for a dip.

Pembrokeshire's sublime south

Think of Pembrokeshire, and chances are St Davids comes to mind, but there are quieter corners of this glorious county, says Tim Auld in the FT – and none are more beautiful than the Stackpole Estate, at the far southwestern tip of Wales. Long owned by the Campbells of Cawdor, Stackpole Court was demolished in 1963, but you can still wander past its vast lily ponds (now home to otters) down to Barafundle Bay and Broad Haven South, two of Britain's most spectacular beaches. Nearby, there are "cathedral-like" sea caves, and other fabulous beaches, including Freshwater West, home of the Welsh National Surfing Championships; it was also here that Dobby was buried in the *Harry Potter* films. You could stay in a National Trust cottage at Stackpole Cheriton, or at The Stackpole Inn, which has an excellent restaurant.

Last-minute offers from top travel companies

Portomaso waterfront stay
Spend 5 nights at the luxurious Hilton Malta hotel, with panoramic views, from £396pp b&b, including Manchester flights. 020-3368 3117, inspiredluxuryescapes.com. Depart 30 November.

Mexico in 11 days
Dive deeper into Mexico's central highlands, with stops in Guadalajara and Morelia. From £1,699pp b&b, including Birmingham flights. 020-3813 3834, exoticca.com. Depart 6 March 2023.

Cape Verde getaway
Set on an idyllic white sand beach on the island of Sal, the Hotel RIU Palace Santa Maria has 7 nights from £964pp all-incl., including London flights. 020-3451 2688, tui.co.uk. Depart 8 December.

Five nights in Lisbon
Stay at the 5-star Real Palácio hotel, in one of the most stylish quarters of the capital, from £490pp b&b, including Dublin flights. 020-8974 7200, travelrepublic.co.uk. Depart 14 September.

Covid-19: please check government websites for testing and quarantine requirements, and the rules surrounding children (gov.uk).

Maverick scientist who proposed the Gaia hypothesis

James Lovelock 1919-2022

James Lovelock, who has died aged 103, was best known for his Gaia hypothesis, said The Guardian. Named after the Greek goddess of Earth, it suggests that the planet is not just a lump of rock – a "passive host" to millions of species that adapt to their environment – but a complex, self-regulating system, made up of biological and non-biological parts that interact, in a process of co-evolution, to create the conditions favourable to life. He and his collaborator, the American microbiologist Lynn Margulis, warned that human activity was, in various ways, throwing this system off-kilter, gravely imperilling our future on the planet. First proposed in the 1960s and developed in the 1970s, the idea was taken up by the flower power generation and, as a result, it was easily dismissed by its critics as hippie nonsense; but in fact, it was well grounded in science, said Nature, and even if the hypothesis has not been fully accepted, it has "profoundly influenced" the way we think about the environment, and our interactions with it.

Lovelock: a profound influence

James Lovelock was born in 1919, and brought up in Brixton, south London, where his parents ran a shop. He won a place at a local grammar school, but it was spending long hours in his local library that fired his fascination with science. He read books on everything from astronomy to chemistry, but his parents could not afford to support him through university, so on leaving school he took a job as a lab technician, and studied for a BSc in his spare time. As a Quaker, he registered as a conscientious objector on the outbreak of the Second World War; he later changed his mind, but was not allowed to enlist because his research work was considered too valuable. By then, he was at the National Institute for Medical Research in north London, where he investigated cryopreservation. Looking at ways to revive chilled rodents, he experimented with microwaves; and for fun, he used microwave radiation to cook his lunch – but he failed to see the commercial potential of a microwave oven. More significantly, he invented the electron capture detector, a matchbox-sized device that could be used to measure trace amounts of chlorine-based compounds in the air. This revealed the global spread of chlorofluorocarbons, or CFCs, which were later found to be depleting the ozone layer, and the build-up in the environment of the pesticide DDT, which in 1962 became the focus of the conservationist Rachel Carson's influential book *Silent Spring*. Eventually, laws were brought in to reduce the use of both substances.

He was working at Nasa when the seeds of the Gaia theory was born, said The New York Times. Assigned to a project looking for signs of life on Mars, he examined the chemical composition of its atmosphere; on the basis that it was 95% carbon dioxide, he predicted that the planet would be lifeless. He was then motivated to look at Earth's atmosphere, and to question why it was so pleasant and stable. He concluded that organisms on the planet itself were regulating it through complex feedback loops. He discussed his ideas with his neighbour in the Wiltshire village of Bowerchalke, the novelist William Golding, who suggested he name his theory Gaia. In the 1970s, he collaborated with Margulis on research to support the notion.

A maverick who preferred to work independently, Lovelock was apocalyptic in his warnings about climate change; but he wasn't fully on board with the green movement. He was an advocate for nuclear energy, as an alternative to fossil fuels, and for GM food; and he had faith in the ability of corporations to bring about change. Sometimes, he said, he wished the Greens "would grow up" and focus on the real question: "How can we feed, house and clothe the abundant human race without destroying the habitats of other creatures?" Lovelock's first wife, Helen, whom he had married in 1942, died in 1989. Two years later, he married Sandra Orchard. She survives him, along with his four children.

Actress and singer who blazed a trail on *Star Trek*

Nichelle Nichols 1932-2022

Nichelle Nichols, who has died aged 89, was a member of the original cast of *Star Trek* – and the only African American on the starship Enterprise. Gene Roddenberry had written the role of Lieutenant Uhura (the name is based on the Swahili word for freedom) as part of his vision for a progressive future for America, said The Guardian; but during filming, Nichols noted that whenever scenes had to be shortened, it was her lines that got cut. "Eventually, I was down to: 'Hailing frequencies open, sir.'" After one season, she was offered a plum role on Broadway, and decided to quit. It was a chance meeting with Martin Luther King Jr that changed her mind. Professing himself a fan, the civil rights leader told her that she was the first African American actress in a non-stereotypical role, one with "honour, dignity and intelligence", she told an interviewer in 2011. "He said: 'You simply cannot abdicate. This is an important role. This is why we are marching. We never thought we'd see this on TV.'"

Nichols: worked with Nasa

She duly stayed on the show, and in season two, in an episode called *Plato's Stepchildren*, Uhura and Captain Kirk (William Shatner) took part in one of the first interracial kisses on US television. The producers were so worried about the public response, they insisted on filming two versions of the scene, one with the kiss off camera; but Nichols and Shatner deliberately fluffed the takes on this version, so that it couldn't be shown. In the event, they received almost no complaints, only lots of letters asking Nichols what it was like to kiss Captain Kirk, and vice versa.

Nichols was born in Robbins, Illinois, in 1932, the daughter of Samuel Earl, a magistrate, and his wife Lishia. Her paternal grandfather had been a white southerner who became estranged from his family when he married a black woman. She studied classical dance at the Chicago Ballet Academy, and by the age of 15 she was singing and dancing professionally. In the early 1950s, she toured with Duke Ellington, and in 1959 she had a role in the film version of *Porgy and Bess*. She appeared in Roddenberry's first show, *The Lieutenant*, before auditioning for *Star Trek*. It was cancelled in 1969, but she voiced the character of Uhura in an animated series in the 1970s, appeared in six *Star Trek* spin-off films, and was a regular presence at *Star Trek* conventions. From the mid-1970s, she worked on a Nasa recruitment programme aimed at women and ethnic minorities. Among its recruits were Sally Ride, the first American woman in space, and Guion Bluford, the first black US astronaut.

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Companies in the news

...and how they were assessed

Unilever/Ben & Jerry's: brand warfare

In an "unusual case of a brand taking on its corporate owner", Ben & Jerry's has gone to court to block Unilever from resuming sales of its ice cream in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, said Saabira Chaudhuri on WSJ.com. The Vermont-based company decided last year that allowing its products to be sold in Jewish settlements ran contrary to "its social mission". Unilever disagreed. Now a US court will decide whether the UK conglomerate has the right to transfer Ben & Jerry's assets in Israel "to a local licensee". Back in 2000, Unilever was so keen to acquire Ben & Jerry's that it allowed it to retain an independent board, said Judith Evans in the Financial Times. That arrangement worked while the companies' values were aligned; but now it's got to the point where Unilever is no longer paying the independent board members. In the UK, the case has sparked a political debate, said David Connett on iNews. Tory MP Kemi Badenoch made Ben & Jerry's a focus of her "war on woke" leadership campaign, claiming that the trend for bosses to focus on "purpose over profit" had contributed to "an underlying economic, social, cultural and intellectual malaise". Be that as it may, Unilever did something very unusual when it handed power to the brand; now a judge will have to sort it out.

PwC/BT: the Italian job scandal

When a £500m-plus fraud was discovered at BT's subsidiary in Italy in 2016, it led to a proper unravelling, said Alistair Osborne in The Times. This "Italian job" wiped £8bn off the telecom group's market value and "blew the doors off the reign of boss Gavin Patterson". So it's only right that the Financial Reporting Council has now gone after the auditor, PwC – though the ruling is rather odd. BT admitted that its profits in Italy had been overstated for a number of years because of "improper accounting practices". Yet the accounting watchdog hasn't nailed PwC "for not noticing any of that". Rather, it seems the firm's "big goof" was a lack of "professional scepticism" in the way it dealt with "the impact of the fraud" on adjustments to the accounts. "It's all a bit technical." Once again, a great audit firm has "been found wanting", said Alex Brummer in the Daily Mail. And once again, the response has been "feeble". PwC has received "a rap across the knuckles" and a £2.5m fine, which is really nothing in a firm where the "profit per partner" rose to £920,000 in the year to June. It seems "regulatory trauma is simply a cost of doing business badly".

John Lewis: over-50s, your country needs you

Where have all the over-50s gone? It's a question preoccupying the John Lewis boss Sharon White. She says that the "Great Resignation" – the million people, many of them over 50, who have left the UK workforce since the pandemic – has put pressure on firms to raise wages, which has in turn fuelled inflation, said Anna Wise in the London Evening Standard. "There isn't a business in the UK that is not finding it very difficult to recruit at the moment," she told BBC Radio 4's *Today*. The combination of staff shortages, double-digit inflation and looming recession has certainly created an unprecedented economic situation, said Mark Sweney in The Guardian. What should be done? White says the Government must do more to encourage "retirees" back to work – even part-time. As she says: "one million people out of the labour market has profound long-term implications".

Seven days in the Square Mile

The Bank of England raised interest rates by 50 basis points to 1.75% and warned that the UK economy is set to enter recession in the fourth quarter. The Bank expects inflation to peak at 13.3% this year, and to remain close to 10% in a year's time before falling back to its 2% target. The most shocking forecast was of a "Long Recession" – the BoE anticipates no growth in Britain for almost two years. The latest US inflation figures delivered welcome evidence of cooling prices: CPI inflation decelerated in July by more than expected (from 9.1% in June to 8.5%), reflecting lower energy prices.

In Europe, the race among energy providers to secure sources of supply continued. British Gas owner Centrica signed a £7bn agreement with Delfin Midstream to buy one million tonnes of liquefied natural gas annually from the US from 2026. Fears grew that Pakistan could follow Sri Lanka into default as it struggles with soaring commodity prices and tighter credit conditions.

Some 115,000 Royal Mail workers are set to strike on four days in August and September in a dispute over pay. The Communication Workers Union rejected a reported 5.5% pay offer. Elon Musk sold almost $7bn-worth of shares in his electric vehicle company Tesla, to avoid an emergency sale if he is forced to buy Twitter. The boss of the private equity group Carlyle, Kewsong Lee, unexpectedly resigned, after a request for a $300m pay package was rejected.

SoftBank: tech victim logs record loss – and hints at return

"If we had been a little more selective and invested properly, it would not have hurt as much," observed SoftBank boss Masayoshi Son, as he lamented a record $23.4bn quarterly loss at the Japanese tech investment group. It was a fine display of "chagrin", said Jennifer Hughes on Reuters Breakingviews, but "a poor defence" of the "bad bets" made by SoftBank's venture capital arm, Vision Funds, whose losses accounted for the bulk of the bill. "In the British nursery rhyme, the Grand Old Duke of York marched his men up and down a hill to no effect. SoftBank evokes similar feelings of futility." When markets rise, so does the $62bn group's performance and Son's "braggadocio". When they fall, SoftBank is revealed as "a firm that can only follow, not outperform, the crowd".

Son: underperforming

Son said he was "ashamed" of his pursuit of risky profits. But even safer bets like SoftBank's stake in Uber – which has now been sold – have underperformed against his grand vision, delivering just a "measly" 5% rate of return. Indeed, the scene is now set for some "dramatic" cost-cutting and asset sales, said Leo Lewis and Eri Sugiura in the FT. SoftBank has sharply reduced its stake in the Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba, and started talks to sell asset manager Fortress Investment Group. It remains tight-lipped on the fate of the UK-based chipmaker Arm.

It's probably safe to assume that Son's own military hero isn't the Duke of York. In fact, he made his presentation beneath a portrait of the 17th century shōgun Tokugawa Ieyasu, said Katie Prescott in The Times. Having suffered huge losses in battle, Ieyasu famously learnt from his mistakes and returned to bring peace and prosperity to Japan. Does Son think he can similarly triumph over his current adversity? Dream on, "Masa".

Talking points

Issue of the week: is the BoE fit for purpose?

Liz Truss wants to change the Bank's inflation mandate? Is she just playing politics?

The Bank of England governor Andrew Bailey recently received an email from a member of the public begging him to "please, please, please be more cheerful". The best he could come up with, said The Economist, was: "We are not doomed, far from it. But we are in difficult times." He's not kidding. For the first time since polling began in 1999, more people are "dissatisfied" with the Bank's performance than satisfied. And "the political environment" has become ever more "hostile" – with the frontrunner to be the next PM, Liz Truss, attacking the Bank for excessive money-printing and "suggesting that its mandate needs toughening up".

Bailey: "an unusually apocalyptic economic outlook"

Even by his own standards, Bailey delivered "an unusually apocalyptic economic outlook" as he announced the biggest interest-rate hike for 25 years, said Marcus Ashworth on Bloomberg. After the Truss camp accused the Bank of "talking Britain into a recession", tensions were further fuelled by Business Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng, who warned that "something has gone wrong" on Threadneedle Street, said Tony Diver in The Daily Telegraph. Under plans being floated, the Bank could be told to abandon its 2% inflation target and ordered to target nominal GDP (the size of the economy in cash terms) instead. It sounds a minor tweak, but it actually spells a "radical" overhaul. There's no doubt the BoE needs it, said Ambrose Evans-Pritchard in the same paper. Whatever new model Truss suggests "could not be worse" than the "dog's dinner of corrupted New Keynesian fallacies" currently dictating BoE policy. By worshipping at the altar of "inflation expectations", and ignoring money supply signals, the Bank wildly underestimated the inflation danger. Now it is compounding the error with "a double-decker" interest-rate rise just as the inflation cycle has "already rolled over" and the threat is receding.

Yet there are actually plenty of reasons for maintaining the status quo, said Valentina Romei in the FT: not least the fact that the Bank has a pretty good long-term track record of hitting its mandated inflation target. Moreover, any call for a review by the Government is likely to raise "questions about the BoE's independence" – and that would certainly worry investors. Truss's "frankly bizarre suggestion that the Bank should target money supply makes little sense to anyone who remembers the lesson of the 1980s", said The Economist: namely, that "the relationship between money supply and inflation is too unstable for it to work". In circumstances like these, "a sensible politician ought to be grateful" for the Bank's monetary policy independence – "and leave it well alone to take unpopular decisions".

US markets: what the experts think

● End of the bear?

"Oh, poor fund managers. Why the long faces," asked Katie Martin in the Financial Times. "July was great. The S&P 500 put in its best performance since late 2020 with a 9% rally. It was one of the best months in the market of all time." Yet many of Wall Street's finest missed "the soaraway rally". It seems "too much money was tied up in the safe hidey-hole of cash and little was deployed on the upswing". All it took to get markets running again was "a little leniency" in the US Fed's outlook. Traders have since latched on to more solid evidence that "the world's largest economy can avoid a recession", said Robert Miller in The Times. A set of "strong jobs numbers" makes "a mockery of claims that the US economy is on the brink of recession", according to Capital Economics. The main US indices have accordingly risen "closer to exiting a bear market".

Bed Bath & Beyond: a "winning streak"

● Meme-mentum

There are certainly signs of a return to animal spirits, said Bloomberg. "Retail traders who lurk in forums like Reddit's WallStreetBets are back to betting against Wall Street pros." In shades of last year's mania, "meme stocks" (i.e. those so out, they're in) are rallying again. Shares in the homeware retailer, Bed Bath & Beyond, "nearly tripled at one point during its nine-day winning streak"; the cinema chain AMC Entertainment staged a 65% rally. Overall, a basket of 37 meme stocks tracked by Bloomberg powered 10% higher. "Many retail traders are scanning their favourite plays and looking to get back in," said strategist Ed Moya of OANDA. But the resurrection of "meme-mentum" will only last "if US stocks broadly continue to head higher".

● Hold your horses

I hate to be a killjoy, said Mohamed El-Erian in the Financial Times, but it's still much "too early to declare the recession-watch over". Rate rises and the contraction of the Federal Reserve's bloated $9trn balance sheet could yet "pull the rug from under the economy and market". The government bond market "seems more attuned to" the risk than stock markets – as shown by "the current inversion of the yield curve". When short-term rates rise above longer ones, it is "a traditional signal of a rapidly slowing economy".

Crypto thaw

The bullish feeling across the pond has spread to e-currencies, amid signs that the punishing crypto winter may be abating, reported Matthew Fox on Business Insider. Bitcoin has jumped 36% since its mid-June low (following a 75% plunge). Ether is up by 102% – prompting JPMorgan to observe that crypto prices have "found a floor".

Analysts there attribute the optimism partly to evidence of "limited new contagion" following the collapse of Terra/Luna and other stablecoins. But they reckon "the real driver" is the long-awaited "ethereum merge", which should make the network "faster and more efficient from an energy consumption perspective". Still, there's a long way to go before the broader market recovers. Trading volumes in cryptos fell in July, and trading volumes of NFTs (cryptographic assets) have "collapsed 84% year-on-year".

The world's biggest asset manager, BlackRock, has just sealed a partnership with Coinbase – the largest US crypto-currency exchange – to provide services for its big customers, said Lex in the FT. After the whacking it has taken (shares have fallen two-thirds this year), Coinbase could use the boost. But the deal was probably "dreamt up when crypto prices were riding high", and it's questionable if other big funds are clamouring to invest now. "The worst of the sell-off may be over. But so is the speculative fever of 2021."

Britain's bond market body blow

Alex Brummer

Daily Mail

A legacy of the 2008-09 financial crisis, and Covid-19, is that most of the world's advanced economies are entering "the era of great inflation" larded with debt, says Alex Brummer. On the surface, Britain looks comparatively well-placed, with overall borrowing and debt totals below those of the US, Japan, Italy and France – theoretically giving the next Tory leader "more flexibility to swipe the national credit card" than his or her counterparts. But there's "a very big asterisk". The UK is alone among leading economies in having 25% of its debt financed by inflation-linked bonds. Worse, returns are linked to the "hotter" retail price index (currently running at 11.8%). The upshot is that every time the Bank raises interest rates, "it delivers a right hook to the Exchequer": the latest jump in rates to 1.75% will add about £5.5bn to the interest bill on the UK's £2.3trn debt. "That the Government should have bound itself so closely to RPI, frankly, is bonkers." It happened because Treasury officials fell for the same "groupthink" infusing the BoE, and failed to anticipate the inflation threat. "The taxpayer is now being asked to pay heavily."

Solidarity will save the euro

Simon Nixon

The Times

"It has never taken much to trigger Brexiteer fantasies about the imminent demise of the euro," says Simon Nixon. Some now "scent blood in the water". The combination of sky-high gas prices and an Italian political crisis has "raised expectations that the fragility of the single currency is about to be tested again". The economic outlook is certainly bleak and set to get darker, depending on what happens to supplies of Russian gas over the winter. Germany would be hardest hit. But of greater concern, "from a systemic perspective", is the impact of a Russian squeeze on another heavy importer, Italy – where "a deep recession is bound to reignite concerns over debt sustainability". A stress test seems inevitable, and the European Central Bank is preparing for it. Yet Europe's great trump card is its cohesive determination. "As in past crises, eurozone and EU solidarity should not be underestimated." Mandatory gas rationing might test it but, given the economic stakes, a deal would surely be struck. Let's hope a gas squeeze doesn't force Britain to seek access to European stores. "After all, solidarity is always a two-way street."

Clegg slides away from the metaverse

Ben Marlow

The Daily Telegraph

Things have gone from bad to worse in the metaverse, says Ben Marlow. As Mark Zuckerberg "retreats further into his alternative reality", his sidekick, Sir Nick Clegg, "is so keen to distance himself from Meta's mission control" that he'll be spending half his time in London – "joining an exodus of executives" swapping the tech giant's Menlo Park base for King's Cross. "On one level, California's loss is London's gain, proof that the capital is still a magnet for tech talent." Yet it's hard to see the upside for Meta: departures risk reducing the Californian leadership "to a monocultural group of Zuckerberg acolytes". Hopes were bright when the ex-Lib Dem leader signed up to become "the acceptable face of Facebook", but he has failed in his efforts to change its culture. "If anything, Meta has become less accountable": Clegg "has been paid a fortune to simply take Zuckerberg's place in the stocks". With sales now in reverse, Meta has "entered the toughest phase in its history". Who could blame a pragmatist for reading the runes and "stepping away at the first opportunity"?

On Wall Street, the game never ends

Buttonwood

The Economist

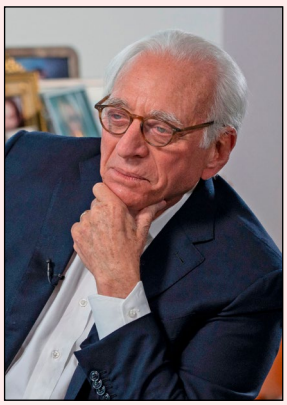
It is telling that one of the best books about financial markets is now almost a century old, says Buttonwood. *Reminiscences of a Stock Operator*, a fictionalised account of the exploits of speculator Jesse Livermore, "captures a particular time – of bucket shops, insider pools and dandy tips on Western Union or American Steel. But it is also timeless." Livermore, who made a fortune selling the market short in 1907, and repeated the trick in 1929, realised a century ago that "there is nothing new on Wall Street" and "what happens today in markets has happened before and will happen again". Technology changes, but people do not – "manias, scams and iffy schemes are recurring evils". So are doom-mongers, with their predictions of "an endgame in which all excesses will be washed from markets". Perhaps a reckoning is already in train. "But it cannot be the endgame" because, as Livermore teaches, "the game never ends". History suggests "a big bust would merely set the stage for another phase of play" as "the unceasing contest between fear and greed resumes".

City profiles

Lars Fruergaard Jørgensen

It would usually be thought rude to ask a stranger about their calorie consumption, said Sabah Meddings in The Sunday Times. But it's open season on the boss of Danish drug-maker Novo Nordisk, which is launching "a block-buster weight-loss drug" in the UK. For the record, Lars Fruergaard Jørgensen's regimen looks exemplary: "a bowl of overnight oats for breakfast, a slice of rye bread and herring for lunch", and an equally healthy dinner. Novo's weight-loss injection, named Wegovy, "works by mimicking a hormone naturally released after eating that dampens appetite". Uptake has been so steep in the US that reports of supply shortages recently caused havoc, wiping 10% off Novo's shares. The message for UK guinea pigs? "Be patient."

Nelson Peltz



The veteran US investment activist Nelson Peltz has spent decades stirring up boardroom trouble. Now he is learning "how it feels to be on the wrong end of a revolt", said Patrick Hosking in The Times. Rebel shareholders in Trian Investors 1 – a London-listed investment vehicle managed by Peltz – have ousted the chairman and are bidding to take control, accusing the firm "of trapping them in order to continue extracting fees". The dispute has attracted attention partly because Peltz, 80, is now the father-in-law of Brooklyn Beckham – but also due to its "prize activist hypocrisy", said Alistair Osborne in the same paper. Peltz is "playing fast and loose with governance rules". He'd be furious if a company "tried the same low-ball tactics with him".

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Who's tipping what

The week's best shares

Greggs
The Times
Inflation has hit the low-cost bakery's margins, but the new delivery service and longer trading hours have boosted sales as Greggs targets expansion in stations, airports and retail parks. Highly cash-generative. Buy. £20.78.

Halma
The Mail on Sunday
Halma owns 43 safety, environmental and healthcare firms, acquiring four or five well-run businesses each year, and has become a global leader in automated leak detection. Resilient, with a strong track record. Buy. £22.37.

Relx
Investors' Chronicle
Relx has transformed itself from a newsprint publisher, to a provider of data analytics, decision and fraud prevention tools. A high quality and defensive firm. Growing strongly, boosted by the return of live events. Buy. £23.24.

Sage Group
The Times
The software firm is generating more revenue via recurring subscription sources, which could prove more resilient. Price rises have offset the impact of wage cost rises, and lower marketing spend should boost margins. Buy. 707.6p.

Sureserve Group
The Sunday Times
The energy sector services firm operates in "dull but important" areas such as smart meters and gas compliance. Pushing into heat pumps, insulation and battery storage. The order book is up by 50%. Buy. 84p.

Unite Group
The Daily Telegraph
This property fund owns student digs in "prime" Russell Group uni cities where demand outstrips supply. An "inflation fighter" – rents increase yearly, 70% of debt is at fixed rates, energy is bought in bulk and in advance. Buy. £11.48.

...and some to hold, avoid or sell

Compass Group
The Sunday Telegraph
The contract caterer made a solid recovery as schools and unis reopened and workers returned to offices. Shares are toppy, but growing margins and a geographical spread reduce risk. Hold. £19.08.

Judges Scientific
The Mail on Sunday
Judges buys high quality tech firms (including soil testing specialist GDS Instruments; and geoscience instrument-maker Geotek) and helps them to grow. Profits have rebounded after a dip, and further growth is forecast. Hold. £85.

Next
The Times
Next has benefited from a Darwinian struggle among high street retailers, and a symbiotic relationship between online and in-store retail. Highly cash-generative and well set to survive weaker spending. Hold. £67.46.

Quartix Technologies
Investors' Chronicle
Quartix provides telematic data analysis services for motor fleets and insurers. Despite top line growth, profits are down. Marketing expenses are rising and uncertainty abounds amid a changing car industry. Shares look pricey. Sell. 333p.

Rolls-Royce
The Times
Shares in the industrial engineer remain 65% lower than pre-Covid, and margins have declined. Hit by the slow recovery of civil aviation, supply chain constraints and a shortage of experienced engineers. Avoid. 90p.

Shell
Investors' Chronicle
The energy crisis has pushed profits to new highs – with investment in North Sea production and new project approvals – but the dominating uncertainty is whether Shell can juggle cash-generation with green plans. Sell. £21.54.

Directors' dealings

Wizz Air

Despite quadrupling revenue, the airline faces a €285m loss. Chair William Franke seems to think the 45% sell-off has been overdone, buying £1.9m of shares. Yet analysts fear a liquidity squeeze ahead as Wizz works to grow capacity.

SOURCE: FT

Form guide

Shares tipped 12 weeks ago

Best tip
Serco Group
The Sunday Times
up 18.45% to 175.3p

Worst tip
FD Technologies
Investors' Chronicle
down 29.27% to £17.54

Market view

"Work-life balance should be in a state that is sustainable for the long term. In 2021, that balance was out of whack."
David Goldschmidt, of Wall Street law firm Skadden, on the drying up of the US IPO market. Quoted in the FT

Market summary

Key numbers for investors

	9 Aug 2022	Week before	Change (%)
FTSE 100	7488.15	7409.11	1.07%
FTSE All-share UK	4129.39	4091.26	0.93%
Dow Jones	32801.88	32647.94	0.47%
NASDAQ	12481.72	12402.81	0.64%
Nikkei 225	27999.96	27594.73	1.47%
Hang Seng	20003.44	19689.21	1.60%
Gold	1784.05	1772.40	0.66%
Brent Crude Oil	96.42	101.04	-4.57%
DIVIDEND YIELD (FTSE 100)	3.67%	3.69%	
UK 10-year gilts yield	1.97	1.87	
US 10-year Treasuries	2.78	2.70	
UK ECONOMIC DATA			
Latest CPI (yoy)	9.4% (Jun)	9.1% (May)	
Latest RPI (yoy)	11.8% (Jun)	11.7% (May)	
Halifax house price (yoy)	11.8% (Jul)	13.0% (Jun)	

£1 STERLING: $1.208 €1.183 ¥163.205 Bitcoin $22,962

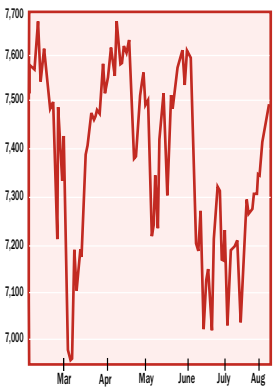
Best and worst performing shares

WEEK'S CHANGE, FTSE 100 STOCKS

RISES	Price	% change
Avast	683.00	+42.92
Hargreaves Lansdown	943.00	+14.25
Endeavour Mining (Lon)	1748.00	+7.97
Antofagasta	1185.50	+6.37
Flutter Entertainment	8614.00	+6.11
FALLS		
WPP	798.00	-9.24
Hikma Pharmaceuticals	1594.00	-7.94
Mondi	1477.00	-6.31
Centrica	84.12	-5.63
Croda International	7010.00	-5.53
FTSE 250 RISER & FALLER		
TP Icap Group	132.50	+11.80
Molten Ventures	411.60	-13.50

Source: Refinitiv/FT (not adjusted for dividends). Prices on 9 August (pm)

Following the Footsie



6-month movement in the FTSE 100 index

The Turkish drone that changed modern warfare

The Bayraktar TB2 has brought precision air strike capabilities to Ukraine and other countries. It's also a diplomatic tool, enabling Turkey's rise. Stephen Witt meets its maker

A video posted towards the end of February on the Facebook page of Valerii Zaluzhnyi, the commander-in-chief of Ukraine's armed forces, showed grainy aerial footage of a Russian military convoy approaching the southern city of Kherson. Russia had invaded Ukraine several days earlier, and Kherson was an important strategic site. At the centre of the screen, a targeting system locked on to a vehicle in the middle of the convoy; seconds later, the vehicle exploded, and a tower of burning fuel rose into the sky. "Behold the work of our life-giving Bayraktar!" the translated caption read. "Welcome to Hell!"

The TB2: "it's not too cheap, but it's not too expensive"

The Bayraktar TB2 is a flat, grey unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), with angled wings and a rear propeller. It carries laser-guided bombs and is small enough to be carried in a flatbed truck, and it costs a fraction of similar American and Israeli drones. Its designer, Selçuk Bayraktar, the son of a Turkish auto-parts entrepreneur, is one of the world's leading weapons manufacturers. In the defence of Ukraine, Bayraktar has become a legend, the namesake of a baby lemur at the Kyiv zoo, and the subject of a catchy folk song, which claims that his drone "makes ghosts out of Russian bandits".

In April 2016, the TB2 scored its first confirmed kill. Since then, it has been sold to at least 13 countries, bringing the tactic of the precision air strike to the developing world and reversing the course of several wars. In 2020, in a conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Azerbaijan's dictatorial leader, Ilham Aliyev, used the TB2 to target vehicles and troops, then displayed footage of the strikes on digital billboards in the capital city of Baku. The TB2 has now carried out more than 800 strikes, in conflicts from North Africa to the Caucasus. The bombs it carries can adjust their trajectories in mid-air, and are so accurate that they can be delivered into an infantry trench. Military analysts had previously assumed that slow, low-flying drones would be of little use in conventional combat, but the TB2 can take out the anti-aircraft systems that are designed to destroy it. "This enabled a fairly significant operational revolution in how wars are being fought right now," Rich Outzen, a former US State Department specialist on Turkey, told me. "This probably happens only once every 30 or 40 years."

I spoke with Bayraktar in March on a video call. He was in Istanbul, at the headquarters of his company, Baykar Technologies, which employs more than 2,000 people. When I asked about the use of his drones in Ukraine, he told me, "They're doing what they're supposed to do – taking out some of the most advanced air-defence systems and armoured vehicles in the world." Bayraktar, who is 42, has a widow's peak, soft eyes, and a slightly off-centre nose. He was flanked by models of new drones, mounted on plastic stands, which he showed me with the unconcealed pride of an aviation geek.

"Any UAV built today to fly, I pilot it myself, because I, like, love it," he told me. Bayraktar, who has more than two million followers on Twitter, uses his account to promote youth-education initiatives, celebrate Turkish martyrs, and post pictures of new aircraft designs. "Some people here consider him like Elon Musk," Federico Donelli, an international relations researcher at the University of Genoa, told me.

In 2016, Bayraktar married Sümeyye Erdogan, the youngest daughter of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's president. The country's arms industry has grown tenfold in the past 20 years, and most of the country's military equipment is now manufactured locally. "The Bayraktars, and particularly the TB2s, have turned into the flagship of the Turkish defence industry," Alper Coskun, a former Turkish diplomat, told me.

> *"The bombs the TB2 carries can adjust their trajectories in mid-air, and are so accurate that they can be delivered into an infantry trench"*

Turkey borders Iran, Iraq, Syria, Armenia, Georgia, and the European Union, and it faces Russia across the Black Sea. Donelli told me that the shifting allegiances and complex politics of the region reminded him of Europe in the days before the First World War. "In Bayraktar, they have a kind of genius who can change the historical path of Turkey," Donelli said.

Erdogan has held power since 2003. During that time, he has seized control of the courts and the press, amended the Turkish constitution, and advocated for a return to traditional roles for women. Journalists critical of the regime have been beaten with baseball bats, and opposition activists have been sentenced to decades in prison. But Turkey's economy is stagnating, and its inflation rate rose to 70% during the past 12 months. In 2019, Erdogan's party lost the mayoralty of Istanbul, which it had held since the 1990s. The TB2 is a spectacular propaganda machine, and Erdogan has used its success to promote his vision for Turkish society. As Bayraktar told me, "In this day and age, the biggest change in our lives is driven by technology – and who drives the changes? The ones who create technology."

Bayraktar and his family live on Baykar's grounds, which he compared to a university campus, with sports facilities and a

park that he called "bigger than Google's". While we spoke, his mother, his wife, and the couple's four-year-old daughter were eating dinner in the room next door. Bayraktar told me that he was one of the oldest engineers at Baykar, and that many of the firm's programmers are women. "My software side comes from my mother," he said.

Bayraktar with his wife and daughter

Bayraktar was born in Istanbul in 1979, the middle of three brothers. His father, Özdemir, the son of a fisherman, graduated from Istanbul Technical University and founded an auto-parts company; Canan, his mother, was an economist and a computer programmer in the punch-card era. The brothers were introduced to machine tools at an early age. "We were working, all throughout our childhood, in the factory," Bayraktar told me. By the time he was a teenager, he was a competent tool and die maker. Özdemir was also an amateur pilot, and as a boy Selçuk would survey Turkey's splendid geography from the window of his father's plane. "A small aircraft, it's like sailing in there," he told me. "You feel like a bird." Bayraktar was soon building radio-controlled aeroplanes from kits, sometimes modifying them with his own designs. "I was hiding my model aircraft under my bed, and working on it secretly," he said. "I should have been studying for my exams."

"Some see Bayraktar's wife as a fashionable, feminist upgrade on her father's politics – a Turkish version of Ivanka Trump"

Bayraktar's radio-controlled aircraft prototypes impressed academic researchers. In 2002, after graduating from Istanbul Technical, he was recruited to the University of Pennsylvania. For his master's degree, he flew two drones in formation at the Fort Benning Army base in Georgia. Bayraktar then began a second master's at MIT in the US, where he pursued the difficult and offbeat goal of trying to land a radio-controlled helicopter on a wall. His adviser, Eric Feron, remembered Bayraktar as a dedicated craftsman and an observant Muslim, with a passion for youth education. He recalled Bayraktar's enthusiasm when he tutored Feron's daughter in her mathematics homework, and the time he demonstrated his helicopter to a troop of Girl Scouts. "He was a good pilot," Feron said. "But I did not understand all that he was after until I got invited to his wedding."

While Bayraktar was a student, the US was using Predator drones to strike targets in Afghanistan and Iraq. Bayraktar disapproved of US foreign policy – "I was obsessed with Noam Chomsky," he told me – but he was drawn to the autonomous vehicles. While still enrolled at MIT, he began building small prototype drones at the family's factory in Istanbul. His father, Özdemir, set out to secure government support for the drones, and by the mid-2000s Bayraktar was spending his university holidays embedded with the Turkish military. The Bayraktar family also had ties to Erdogan, who was elected prime minister in 2002 and assumed power the following year. Bayraktar's father had been an adviser to Erdogan when he was a local politician in Istanbul, and Bayraktar recalled him visiting the family house.

Bayraktar's first drone, the hand-launched Mini UAV, flew about ten feet in early tests, but he refined the design, and soon the Mini could stay aloft for more than an hour. He tried it out in the snowy mountains of southeastern Anatolia, surveilling the armed rebels of the PKK, a Kurdish separatist movement. Feron, his old MIT adviser, recalled his astonishment when he contacted Bayraktar in the mountains. "He has no hesitation to go to the front lines, to really the worst conditions that the Turkish military can go into, and basically be with them, and live with them, and learn directly from the user," he said. Bayraktar told me he prefers to field-test a drone in an active combat theatre. "It needs to be battle-hardened and robust," he said. "If this doesn't work at 10,000-feet elevation, at -30°C temperature, then this is just another item that you have to carry in your backpack."

In 2014, Bayraktar debuted a prototype of the TB2, a fixed-wing aircraft large enough to carry munitions. That year, Erdogan won the presidential election. A popular referendum had given him control of the courts as well, and he began using his powers to prosecute political enemies. "They arrested not only a quarter of active duty admirals and generals, but also many of Erdogan's civil society opponents," Soner Cagaptay, who has written four biographies of Erdogan, told me.

In 2015, Bayraktar oversaw the first tests of the TB2's precision-strike capability. Using a laser to guide dummy bombs, the drone was able to strike a target the size of a picnic blanket from five miles away. By April 2016, the TB2 was delivering live munitions. The earliest targets were the PKK – drone strikes have now killed at least 20 of the organisation's leaders, along with whoever was standing near them.

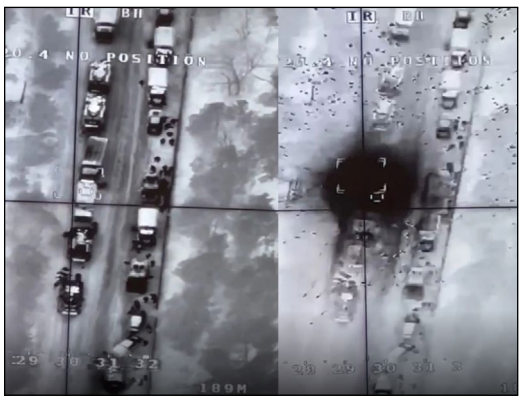
The strikes also taught Bayraktar to fight for the airwaves. Drones are controlled through radio signals, which opponents can jam by broadcasting static. Pilots can counter by hopping frequencies, or by boosting the amplitude of their broadcast signal. "There's so many jammers in Turkey, because the PKK had been using drones, too," Bayraktar said. "It's one of the hottest places to fly." Turkey's remote-controlled counter-insurgency was thought to be the first time a country had conducted a drone campaign against citizens on its own soil, but Bayraktar, citing the threat of terrorism, remains an enthusiastic supporter of the campaign.

That May, he married the president's daughter, Sümeyye. More than 5,000 people attended the wedding, including much of the country's political elite. Sümeyye wore a head scarf and an immaculate long-sleeved white dress from the Paris designer Dice Kayek. By then, the Turkish state had taken on an overtly Islamic character. In the 1990s, the hijab was banned in universities and public buildings. Now "having a hijab-wearing wife is the surest way to get a job in the Erdogan administration," Cagaptay wrote. Bayraktar regularly tweets Islamic blessings to his followers on social media, and both Sümeyye and the elder Canan wear the hijab.

Like Bayraktar, Sümeyye is a second-generation member of Turkey's Islamist elite. She graduated from Indiana University in 2005 with a degree in sociology. "She has great ethics," Bayraktar told me. "She's a real challenger." Other people describe her as a fashionable, feminist upgrade on her father's politics – a Turkish version of Ivanka Trump. "Women have lost significantly under Erdogan in terms of access to political power," Cagaptay told me. "When there are women appointed in the cabinet, they have token jobs."

In June 2016, terrorists affiliated with Isis killed 45 people at the Istanbul airport, and soon a new front was opened in Syria, where Turkey used Bayraktar's drones to attack the short-lived Isis caliphate. (The drones were later turned on Syria's Kurds.) In July, a small group inside the Turkish military staged a coup

against Erdogan. The coup was chaotic and unpopular – the main opposition parties condemned it, a conspirator flying a fighter jet dropped a bomb on the Turkish parliament, and Erdogan was reportedly targeted by an assassination squad sent to his hotel. Erdogan blamed the followers of Fethullah Gülen, an exiled cleric and political leader who now lives in Pennsylvania, and purged more than a hundred thousand government employees. (Gülen denies involvement in the coup.) Bayraktar was now part of Erdogan's inner circle, and his drones were marketed for export.



An undated image of a TB2 strike in Ukraine

Bayraktar is a Turkish celebrity, and his social media feeds are crowded with patriotic "reply guys". When he gives talks to trainee pilots, which he does often, he wears a leather jacket decorated with flight patches; when he tours universities, which he also does often, he wears a blazer over a turtleneck. In our conversation, he referred to concepts from critical gender theory, spoke of Russia's violations of international law, and quoted Benjamin Franklin: "Those who give up essential freedom for temporary security deserve neither security nor freedom."

But he is also a defender of Erdogan's government. In 2017, Erdogan held a constitutional referendum that resulted in the dissolution of the post of prime minister, effectively enshrining his control of the state. Using politically motivated tax audits to seize independent media outlets, his government sold them in single-bidder "auctions" to supporters, and a number of journalists have been jailed for the crime of "insulting the president". Erdogan frequently sues journalists, and Bayraktar has done so, too. He recently celebrated a thirty-thousand-lira fine levied against Çigdem Toker, who was investigating a foundation that Bayraktar helps run. Bayraktar tweeted, "Journalism: Lying, fraud, shamelessness."

> *"A video shows Ukrainian soldiers dancing, laughing and singing Bayraktar's name"*

Bayraktar's older brother, Haluk, is the CEO of Baykar Technologies; Selçuk is the CTO and the chairman of the board. (Their father died last year.) In addition to being used in Ukraine and Azerbaijan, TB2s have been deployed by the governments of Nigeria, Ethiopia, Qatar, Libya, Morocco and Poland. When I spoke with Bayraktar, Baykar had just completed a sales call in East Asia, marketing its forthcoming TB3 drone, which can be launched from a boat.

Several sources have reported that a single TB2 drone can be bought for $1m, but Bayraktar, while not giving a precise figure, told me that it costs more. In any event, single-unit figures are misleading; TB2s are sold as a "platform", along with portable command stations and communications equipment. In 2019, Ukraine bought a fleet of at least six TB2s for a reported $69m; a similar fleet of Reaper drones costs about six times that. "Tactically, it's right in the sweet spot," Bayraktar said of the TB2. "It's not too small, but it's not too big. And it's not too cheap, but it's not too expensive."

Once a fleet is purchased, operators travel to a facility in western Turkey for several months of training. "You don't just buy it," Mark Cancian, a procurement specialist at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, told me. "You have married the supplier, because you need a constant stream of spare parts and repair expertise." Turkey has become adept at leveraging this relationship. It struck a defence deal with Nigeria, which included training the country's pilots on TB2s, in exchange for access to minerals and liquefied natural gas. Unlike when dealing with the US, obtaining weapons from Turkey doesn't involve human rights oversight. "There are really no restrictions on use," Cancian said.

In October last year, Ukraine announced it was building a factory outside Kyiv to assemble Bayraktar's drones. Shortly afterwards, Ukraine released video of a TB2 conducting a strike against an artillery position in the contested eastern region of Donbas. The air force colonel who runs Ukraine's drone program has not revealed his identity, citing security concerns, but in 2019 he travelled to Baykar's facility in western Turkey for three months of training. "I loved it there," he told Al-Monitor, an online newsletter.

Publicly available footage of the early days of the war suggests that TB2s destroyed at least ten Russian missile batteries and disrupted the Russian supply lines by bombing transport trucks. Lately, though, the release of strike videos has slowed. This may be due to security concerns, but it's also possible that the Russians have caught up – the TB2 has no real defence against a fighter jet, and in the lead up to the invasion the Russian military trained against the drones.

In early March, Ukrainian officials announced that they were receiving another shipment from Baykar; by the end of the month, a tally of press releases showed that Russia claimed to have shot down 39 TB2s, which would likely constitute the bulk of the Ukrainian fleet. Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, was initially enthusiastic about the TB2, but in April, at a press conference in a Kyiv subway station, he downplayed the aircraft's importance. "With all due respect to Bayraktar, and to any hardware, I will tell you, frankly, this is a different war," he said. "Drones may help, but they will not make the difference."

In our conversation, Bayraktar condemned Russia's actions but declined to discuss operational specifics. "Let's not put any of these countries at risk," he said. "If any poor Ukrainian was hurt, I would be very sad. I would be responsible on the day of judgement." Bayraktar's software upgrades respond to customer feedback, and his designs continue to evolve. His latest production drone, the twin-prop Akinci, can fly to 40,000 feet and can be equipped with jamming countermeasures.

Bayraktar is also investing in autonomy, and told me that he was ahead of the competition in this area. "That's what our expertise is," he said. "Push a button, and the aircraft lands." An autonomous drone might find its way home if its communication links were severed. To develop such systems, Bayraktar will need to retain programming talent, but Erdogan's regime is struggling against brain drain. "I, personally, know a whole bunch of people who have left," Cagaptay said. "In Turkey, they don't see a future for themselves."

"Sometimes oppression is worse than death," Bayraktar told me. He was referring to Ukraine's efforts to defend itself against the Russian invasion, but, a month after we talked, the Turkish civil-rights campaigner Osman Kavala was sentenced to life in prison, after a politically motivated trial that Amnesty called a "travesty of justice". In May, the Ukrainian defence ministry resumed releasing footage from Bayraktar's drones, showing them striking a pair of Russian patrol boats. Another video released that day showed Ukrainian soldiers, against a backdrop of destroyed Russian vehicles, dancing, laughing, and singing Bayraktar's name.

A longer version of this article appeared in The New Yorker
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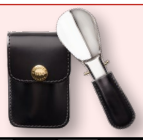
THE WEEK CROSSWORD 1324

An Ettinger shoe horn and two Connell Guides will be given to the sender of the first correct solution to the crossword and the clue of the week opened on Monday 22 August. Send it to The Week Crossword 1324, 121-141 Westbourne Terrace, London W2 6JR, or email the completed grid or listed solutions to crossword@theweek.co.uk. **Tim Moorey (timmoorey.com)**



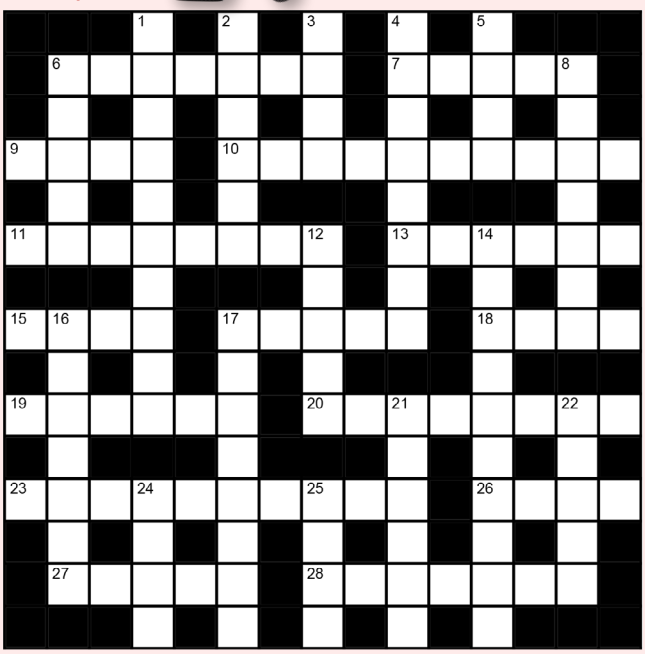
This week's winner will receive an Ettinger (ettinger.co.uk) Bridle Hide travel shoehorn in black, which retails at £75, and two Connell Guides (connellguides.com).

ACROSS

6 Fancy a pop song (7)
7 Finished last of Argos deliveries (5)
9 Pressure on investment in city of listed building (4)
10 Jerk is hesitant? The exact opposite (10)
11 What normally have legs and fly? (8)
13 Permit motorists to back trade association (6)
15 Female supporter returning in bad taste (4)
17 Game is a fiddle on reflection (5)
18 Island sounding like heaven (4)
19 We hear Harry, say goes to press (6)
20 Dramatist, he is right and wrong (8)
23 Musical tenor quits? Could be me (3,7)
26 It's somewhat black in small island (1,3)
27 Time for new ranges in garb for members (5)
28 Relative's eager to get a yellowish cloth (7)

DOWN

1 Urchin seen on a roll after horseplay (10)
2 Anger on the motorway? You won't believe it! (6)
3 Man on newspaper gets lift (4)
4 Communicates with diplomacy amongst Tories (8)
5 Measure of substance by the sound of it (4)
6 One apple drink lacking depth is rather cold (5)
8 Lively engaging fish, long and thin (7)
12 Dicky is out of this in grades (5)
14 Utter cad is about to be sent down (10)
16 Safety features broadcast a great deal (3,4)
17 Red spies off to go separate ways (8)
21 Moderation ending after clubs turned out (6)
22 A vehicle contains one of the birds (5)
24 US elite force member is close (4)
25 High-flyer in European capital wanting opening (4)



Name .....
Address .....
..... Tel no .....
Clue of the week answer: .....

Clue of the week: Supporting pubs in lockdown (6,4 first letters B B)
The Independent, Morph

Solution to Crossword 1322

ACROSS: 1 Obtuse **4** Fairways **10** Eritreans **11** Moore **12** Eternal triangle **13** Suspect **15** Nesbit **18** Onesie **20** Burgeon **22** Leaves on the line **25** Mooch **26** Innocents **27** Shearing **28** Dry run

DOWN: 1 Over easy **2** Thine **3** Stringers **5** Also ran **6** Rumba **7** Alongside **8** Skewed **9** Haslet **14** Singapore **16** Streetcar **17** Anderson **19** Etonian **20** Biting **21** Llamas **23** Ether **24** Inner

Clue of the week: Kit between two poles, when temperature drops (4)
Solution: SKIS (ki(t) inside SS)

The winner of 1322 is Alan Day from Brighton

The Week is available from **RNIB Newsagent** for the benefit of blind and partially sighted readers. 0303-123 9999, rnib.org.uk/newsagent

Sudoku 866 (very difficult)

5				1				9
	4		8		5		6	
			2		3			
	1	5				3	8	
4								1
	7	6				5	9	
			3		8			
	2		9		7		5	
6				2				8

Fill in all the squares so that each row, column and each of the 3x3 squares contains all the digits from 1 to 9

Solution to Sudoku 865

6	9	8	1	2	3	5	7	4
3	2	7	9	5	4	8	1	6
4	5	1	7	6	8	2	9	3
8	1	2	3	4	7	9	6	5
7	3	5	6	9	2	1	4	8
9	6	4	5	8	1	7	3	2
5	4	6	2	1	9	3	8	7
2	7	9	8	3	6	4	5	1
1	8	3	4	7	5	6	2	9

brainedUP.com

Charity of the week

Hamlin Fistula UK

Hamlin Fistula UK is dedicated to the treatment and prevention of childbirth injuries in Ethiopia. We believe in a world without maternal death, birth injuries or obstetric fistula, and support Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia to work towards this vision. Obstetric fistula happens when a baby becomes stuck during childbirth resulting in a devastating injury. Women are left incontinent and sometimes paralysed, and are often stigmatised. The good news is that it is treatable through surgery and preventable by giving women access to professional midwifery care. Hamlin Fistula Ethiopia operates six hospitals, a rehabilitation centre and midwifery training college, and has successfully treated more than 60,000 women; restoring health and livelihoods to some of the world's most marginalised women. **To find out more, visit hamlinfistulauk.org.**

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